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THE
HUNGARIAN CASTLE.

BY
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IN THREE VOLS.

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CHAPTER I.

NUMBERLESS are the trite old adages which tend to inform us that things which we await are ever tardy in their advent. The heir despairs of the death of the relative from whom he is to inherit—the well-jointed and unloving wife of the exit of the husband who will bequeath to her a wealthy widowhood—we are even told, that “it is ill waiting for dead men’s shoon ;” and so in the present case it proved of the long and anxiously expected thaw.

Vain were the sighs heaved by fair young bosoms, and the expletives lavished by impatient cavaliers; the hopes of one party and the prophecies of another. Frost was the prevailing deity of the hour; and Nature wore his livery so gracefully, that it was almost sinful in the impatient who wished her to

exchange his service for that of a newer and more uncertain task-master. The snow lay so deep upon the earth that all its impurities of soil were invisible ; and it looked like a huge mantle of pearl, of which the river, as its ice-bound current glittered in the sunshine, served as the diamond fringe.

But human nature is ever at war with its own happiness ; and the magnificent panorama which encircled the rock-seated border-castle, was contemplated only with impatient distaste by the courtly circle within its halls. It is true that all was luxury and ease in that lordly pile ; but the excitement of adventure was wanting. It had all the monotony of a monastic house, without its wondrous faculty of extracting interest out of trifles. In lieu of a cowled community, or a veiled sisterhood, eager to educe amusement from every passing event, in however minute particles ; as the one bottle of attar is distilled from acres of roses, the frontier-fortress was tenanted by fine ladies and fine gentlemen ; who, however expedient and agreeable they might consider it to kill time, had no idea of allowing time—crude, naked, ungainly time—divested of its loves and graces, to kill them in their turn ; and consequently, much as

these same high-born and tenderly-nurtured daughters of fortune might feel inclined to pity the serge-clad and heart-chilled sisters of the cloister, it remains a question, whether, flinging aside all consideration of the future, and looking only upon the present, those whom they compassionated had not for the moment the happier fate ; for, alas ! fair as were the brows, and cheeks, and lips ; and bright as were the eyes and wits of the lovely ladies located in the fortress, who shall say what plans and projects, what hopes and speculations, were blighted during that tyrant frost, which made the castle to them, and to their spirits, a mere living tomb ?

The convent has no such disappointments ; and little do the denizens of a busy world understand the interest, the value, and the mystery, attached to circumstances apparently the most trifling, by the simple-hearted members of a religious sisterhood. How little do they suspect the thousand laborious occupations of their seemingly lethargic existence ! for, as in this life, everything is comparative, and regulated by external circumstances ; the busy idleness of a cloistered community really grows into labour, aimless and profitless though it may seem

to those whose lot is cast on the stormy waves of an exacting and ever-changeful world.

How would the many smile or scoff, as might best suit their humour, at the childish but harmless superstitions of conventional seclusion ; at the mighty mysteries, the fearful secrets, and the earnest anxieties, born of its innocent simplicity, and nursed by its unsuspecting credulity !

No casual glance can enable the worldling to ascertain this truth ; for the surface of conventional life is smooth and placid as a mirror, whose surface is unsullied by a breath. A well-regulated community is like a fine piece of mechanism, which obeys without resistance the master-spring ; each portion fulfilling its allotted duty with technical precision. But to those who have been dwellers in the cloister, and who have lived for a time in its distinct and circumscribed world, what a study do its inmates present ! How are trifles magnified into magnificence ; annoyances deepened into miseries ; and passing gratifications swelled into positive blessings. The mind, thrown back upon itself, crippled in its energies, and lethargized in its impulses and action, loses its original elasticity, and

succumbs beneath the torpor to which it is consigned.

Then comes the triumph of mere matter ; the victory of the flesh over the intellect ; the second childhood of the spirit, which gives to every incident and to every object an undue value and a factitious importance. Empires may rock, and armies may be smitten down ; man's wrath and the ocean's fury may engulf embattled fleets ; and still the matin and the vesper bell ring out shrilly upon the air ; and the business of the oratory and the refectory, the buttery and the confessional, go forward as calmly and as methodically as though strife and change were banished from the earth.

That such cannot be the case with a circle of social beings, casually collected, and accidentally thrown for an indefinite period upon each other's society and sympathies, is scarcely wonderful ; for the idea of an approaching separation renders them unsettled in the present. They may enjoy to a certain extent the contact into which they have been brought ; but unless, as in the case of the Count Pálffy, there be some strong and absorbing cause of content and happiness, that yearning for the future, and

its benefits, which the poet has so well expressed where he says—

bliss “Man never *is*, but always *to be* blest,” will still exist to shadow over the brightness of the passing hour.

No individual ever lived in the world who did not hold the enjoyment of the present more lightly than the anticipation of that by which it was to be succeeded : and perhaps it is better so ; for many a noble enterprise, and many a bold venture would be wanting in the world, which is now of daily occurrence, were all mankind possessed of sufficient philosophy to make contentment out of their actual circumstances, and to sit down satisfied, each under his own vine and fig-tree, without endeavouring to remove his land-mark and to widen his territories.

The floating cities of the merchant-princes, who people the wide waste of ocean with costly wares and eager traders, making the luxuries of one land the common necessaries of another ; bartering the produce of the far East against the civilization of the West ; and the gold of Ophir against the manufactures of Britain ; would moulder away for lack of

use : while the gigantic emanations of subtle and energetic minds, to which mankind are debtors for a million of intellectual and social benefits, would have been indulged in the closet as mere dreams of vague speculation and theory, and have produced no results beneficial to the human race.

Nothing would have progressed, save Nature, beautiful Nature ! the living, and glorious, and visible presence of that Great First Cause, who has willed that nothing which He has made shall stagnate or decay. Worlds may crumble, but they exist again through the might of that marvellous progression which we can neither comprehend nor emulate. The chill of winter strips the earth of her bright and varied garb, and all vegetation looks as though it were annihilated for ever ; but the magic touch of spring awakens field and forest once more into life ; and although mankind have become so habituated to the effects of the successive seasons, that far from experiencing any surprise that these things should be, they would exclaim in wonder did only one link in this mysterious and beautiful chain of progression fail through some convulsion of nature, the miracle is not less great ; nor can they who

would be overwhelmed with astonishment should the weather-stripped and frost-fringed boughs fail to put forth once more their leaves and blossoms at a milder season; or the stars to fall from the ethereal vault, and carpet the earth with their galaxy of glory; even dream by what wondrous power life is renewed in the withered branch, or the myriad lamps of heaven are hung about the self-poised dome by which the world is over-canopied.

But we have here indulged in a grave digression; and a resistless train of thought has led us far from our Transylvanian circle, whose weak but natural repinings were its origin. To them we must return, however, merely to state, that despite alike wishes and murmurs, no signs of thaw were discernible throughout the day: and the only variety that occurred, was a violent sleet-storm, which accompanied the setting of the cold sun, and beat against the high casements, as if to remind the impatient party of the value of the fireside luxuries that they were inclined so lightly to overlook.

The evening meal was prolonged to its utmost means of duration; but the most elaborate repast cannot last for ever; and thus the night was yet

young when the Baron's guests passed from the great hall into the well-warmed and brilliantly-lighted saloon, where song, dance, and story were awaiting them ; and within an hour the circle was once more formed, and the young Baron Bánffy, to whose lot it had fallen to commence the evening's narrations, cheerfully resigned himself to his fate, and told a legend of his noble house.

THE HUSBAND.

Although the peculiar fortunes of Hungary, and the fearful vicissitudes to which the country was so long subjected, have rendered its traditions principally records of courage and suffering, it is nevertheless not wanting in others wherein the social virtues compel admiration and command respect. A brave and chivalrous spirit borrows its brightest glory from the foundation of virtue on which its prowess is based ; and the examples have been rare where the hero of whom his nation has had reason to be proud, has not also been as true-hearted and as honourable a man, as he has been bold and earnest as a patriot.

Occasionally indeed nature vomits forth from

the volcano of its wrath one of those human scourges whose hand is against every man, and whose heart is closed against its kind ; but brute force is not heroism, nor can the thirst of blood and self-aggrandizement constitute a patriot. The shouting multitude, ever caught by glare, may follow for a time in the track of the destructive meteor ; but the corruption by which it is engendered will ultimately force itself upon the sense ; and the worthlessness of the worship is no sooner discovered, than they who were the first to bend the knee before the spurious idol, are the most eager to hurl it from its pedestal.

No crowd follows in the train of calm and social virtue. Its atmosphere is one of tranquil holiness ; its hope is in the heart ; it has no ambitious foot upon the step of the world's altar ; it seeks not to awaken with its name the echoes of the forum, the senate, or the public streets ; it asks no laurel-wreath, no war-chariot, no robe of state ; it does not lift its brow to the sunshine in haughty self-reliance, as though it would fain pilfer for itself a portion of the glory upon which it looked : it rather turns away from the gaud and glitter of popularity ;

and sheltering its mild beauty among the peaceful joys of home, lives in the midst of that fine philosophy of feeling and of action which gives to man his best and holiest perceptions of a Deity.

The greatest king, and he whose memory has been enshrined with the most pious veneration in Hungary, was decidedly Matthias Corvinus. Brave in the field, able in the council-chamber, zealous in the cause of the literature, the religion, and the freedom of the country over which he had been called to govern; possessed of the sympathies of the people, and the respect of the neighbouring nations, even those with which he was at war; and conscious in himself of those kingly attributes by which he could alone have hoped to retain the proud position that he occupied, alike to his own honour and to that of Hungary, Matthias was nevertheless still human, and subject to the foibles of his kind; the most prominent being a passionate admiration of beauty, which sometimes hurried him beyond the strict confines of justice and generosity.

This weakness was on one occasion the means of exhibiting the faithfulness and devotion of an individual so worthily and unweariedly, that the very

off-falling of the King, by a strange chance became the cause of virtue, even while it acted as its scourge.

Among the most favoured and powerful courtiers of Matthias was Count Nicholas Bánffy of Also-Lindwa, the husband of Margaretta, Duchess of Lágan, the most beautiful woman in the country; and none better knew the weakness of the monarch than this same Bánffy, who, although he loved Matthias with a devotion which would at any moment have led him to sacrifice his life in his cause, was yet too well aware of the value of the treasure of which he had become possessed, to peril it by any act of silly vanity; and accordingly, notwithstanding her high rank, and the position of her husband, the Duchess did not attend the court of the Queen Beatrice; nor, it must be confessed, had she been greatly urged to do so by her royal mistress, who was by no means insensible to the reports which had reached her of the extraordinary personal attractions of the Count Bánffy's bride; and who well knew that she had already too many rivals, if not in the heart, at least in the fancy of her husband.

The beautiful Duchess, devotedly attached to her gallant lord, cared little for courtly gaieties; and lived on in his castle at Presburg as happily as though she had no claim to share in the regalities of Buda ; but Bánffy himself could not sometimes suppress a regret when he looked upon her, that she should be shut out from a scene of which she must have been the brightest ornament.

The loveliness of the Lady Margaretta was of a character exotic to the country. She was very tall, but so elegantly moulded that every movement was replete with grace. Her large dark blue eyes were fringed with long and silken lashes, as black as night; while the thick masses of her auburn hair, which glittered in the sunlight like threads of gold, were richly plaited with oriental pearls, and depended almost to her feet. She had a brow on which beauty and happiness had impressed their own soft signets; a mouth that was fitted only for smiles and words of gentleness; and a glorious purity about her every look and action that doubled her attractions.

No wonder that the Count Bánffy loved her with an intensity which almost grew to pain; and

that he watched over her with the carefulness of a mother tending her first-born, or a miser gloating over his gold. She was to him dearer than life or light; his existence was bound up in her; and every word of tenderness from her lips fell upon his heart like dew upon the desert-drought.

Nor were those accents few or rare; for the young Duchess returned his affection with a devotedness of feeling rarely equalled. Eminently handsome, and for the age highly accomplished, Nicholas Bánffy was worthy of the passion that he had inspired; while his court favour, and the high national reputation which he enjoyed, were equally well qualified to gratify the ambition of all those who loved him. By birth, his position was one of the most exalted in the nation; and in addition to his ancestral honours, he had acquired individual importance of no mean account, being Captain of the Royal Castle of Presburg, and having twice been ambassador from Corvinus to foreign courts; first to Ferdinand of Sicily, and afterwards to the Duke of Milan.

It could not be expected that so favoured a child of fortune as Bánffy should escape enemies, nor did

he ; and thus it chanced that on one occasion, when Matthias was speaking of him with affectionate commendation, an attendant courtier remarked flippantly on the great good fortune of the Count, who appeared to have centred in himself all the benefits which the world could shower upon one individual ; the approbation of his sovereign, the affection of his countrymen, the confidence of his fellow-citizens, enormous wealth, a handsome person, and, to crown all, the loveliest lady in all Hungary for his wife.

“ Ha ! is it so ?” exclaimed Matthias, instantly aroused into attention ; “ Is the bride of Bánffy indeed so beautiful ?”

“ I have heard it asserted, sire, that so fair a dame as the young Duchess, always excepting our royal mistress, exists not in the land.”

“ By St. Stephen ! you tell us news, my lord ;” pursued the King. “ But wherefore can our trusty Nicholas have so played the churl that we have never seen this fair wonder at our court ? Where does he hide his treasure ?”

“ They live in the Castle of Presburg, your Grace ;” replied the courtier ; “ and so lovingly,

that some of your majesty's nobles who have been their temporary guests have jestingly named the old fortress 'the turtle's nest.' Bánffy sits for hours beside his lady's tapestry-frame, looking into her blue eyes, and forgetting that the world contains aught beside the young Duchess."

"A pattern household, by our Lady!" laughed the sovereign; "We must hope that he will however remember that the captain of a frontier-fortress has other, although perhaps less agreeable, duties to perform. Have we had news from our Austrian borders of late, my Lords?"

"Nothing of which your Grace has not been advised."

"'Tis well;" said Matthias, as he rose from the table where he had been seated during this brief dialogue, and thrust aside a manuscript, upon which he had previously been engaged. "Let one of my secretaries transcribe the letter which I have just written to Ficinus with his best art; and be careful that the amanuensis who is now copying the last folio that we procured from Florence, be cautious that he do no injury to the illuminations of the volume, for they are such as we could by no

means replace. Fail not also to observe that all honour be shown to the learned Bolognese clerk who has at length been induced to sojourn with us for a time; let him lack neither gold nor courtesy, for there is immortality in his gratitude. And now, leave me for awhile; I would fain be alone."

In another moment the vast chamber had but one occupant, and that one had a shade upon his brow, deeper than mere thought should have gathered there. He moved from the casement whence he had been looking over the broad Danube, and passing his fingers through the clinging masses of his light auburn hair, Corvinus began to pace the apartment with a slow and undecided step, so soon as he was assured that he was relieved from the prying eye of courtly curiosity.

"So, so, Nicholas Bánffy;" he murmured to himself as he traversed the floor with his arms tightly folded behind him; "in spite of all my favour, you deny to me both your trust and your confidence. You marry a fair dame, and talk to me only of her high blood and her broad lands; and when I banter you upon the colour of her eyes

and the fashion of her uncle, you put me by with a cold—‘Your Grace jests with me; I have thought only of her gentle nature and her loving heart.’ And is it thus that I have been fooled for a long year? There were enemies upon the frontier forsooth, and Bánffy could not leave his post! There were hostile demonstrations at Vienna, and the captain of Presburg must sleep with his weapon at his thigh! I cry you mercy, my good Count Nicholas; you should be pensioned by my virtuous Queen Beatrice, and canonized in the same calendar with the eleven thousand blessed Virgins, for the care which you take of your sovereign’s morality; for that I read the riddle is as certain as that I will win and wear the lady, always supposing that she be worth the pains.”

And with this unworthy and selfish resolution Matthias terminated his soliloquy; and again placing himself at his writing-table, became speedily absorbed in some new study.

A few moments only had elapsed when he threw himself back in his chair, with a self-gratulatory smile upon his lips; and raising from the desk the paper upon which he had been engaged, exclaimed

aloud : "Now, by Apollo and the nine Muses ! there must be inspiration in the very thought of Bánffy's unseen bride, for I have never before so readily or so harmoniously turned off a quatrain to the praise of any beauty ! If this does not move her——"

"Fear not, my lord—it will——" said a low voice near him, as a hand was laid familiarly upon his shoulder, and he looked up and met the fond glance of the Queen. "I knew, Matthias, that you would not long indulge the morose humour in which you left me, and which sits so ill upon you ; nor had I to learn whither you would retire to woo back a gentler mood. All is forgotten and forgiven ;" and she bent forward, and pressed her lips to his high brow, which was crimson with conflicting feelings. "But what have you here ?" she asked, as she lifted the scroll that lay before him : "By'r Lady ! it is prettily turned ; though you have not looked into my eyes for so many hours that you have forgotten their colour. I pray you to amend the error, which mars the meaning of the verse."

"I am glad to see you so gay of mood, sweet

Beatrice ;" said the King ; "for I must leave you for awhile ere long, and speed to Presburg, where pressing and secret business calls me."

" Does it involve danger, my honoured Lord ?" asked the anxious Queen.

Despite the struggle which he was making to recover his composure, Matthias could not suppress a smile. The Queen either was, or universally affected to be, unconscious of his prominent failing ; and never either by word or look troubled him with a reproach ; but occasionally she made comments, or proffered questions which were almost as irksome. In the present instance, the enquiry that she advanced only seemed to enhance the enjoyment of the mystery ; and he answered carelessly, by assuring her that he was not likely to encounter any risk which he could not readily overcome ; while the Queen, accustomed to his frequent absence, made no further comment on his resolution.

The courtiers, however, were not so easily silenced as the wife ; and many were the marvels and surmises elicited by the sudden determination of the King, among the nobles by whom he was sur-

rounded. Even the very pages employed themselves in vague speculations on the Monarch's motives ; while more than one of those who were in his confidence on similar occasions, gave a shrewd guess at the nature of the business which summoned him from Buda.

"And why to Presburg ?" asked one idler of another ; "There have been no tidings for the last week of the Austrian. There is no hostile force on the frontier. What can take Matthias to Presburg ?"

"What has taken him elsewhere more than once, my lord ?" asked a pert page who was standing by, in reply ; " Illuminated missals are fine things, but bright eyes are finer. I would bet my badge against your lordship's spurs that there is a pretty woman in the case."

"Tush, boy ; you are overbold !" said the magnate whom he had addressed, reprovingly ; "There is no fair dame at Presburg able to lure the Monarch from his studies here. It were well that you should not wear your tongue so loosely."

"Again I say that I will risk my badge but I am right, my lord ;" persisted the lad, indignant at

the rebuke, and eager to show his superior knowledge of the Sovereign's tastes ; " nor is it knightly, while the Lady Margaretta Bánffy keeps house at Presburg, to believe that his Grace tarries here for want of cause to travel further."

" By St. Stephen, the boy is right !" exclaimed another of the group ; " And now I think of it, there was question of the young Duchess only yesterday, and Matthias seemed to take an interest in the subject. He bade us leave him too ; and now he is to speed to the frontier city three days hence. Nicholas Bánffy will scarcely be prepared for such a visitor."

In this belief the speaker was wrong, however ; for one stood by who loved Bánffy as a brother ; and although he forebore to annoy him with what he believed to be the mere idle gossipry of a levy of court minions, he nevertheless deemed it expedient to acquaint him with the purposed advent of the King ; and thus midnight had not chimed from the belfry of the Corvinian palace, when a mounted messenger was on his way to apprise him of the intention of Matthias to visit Presburg.

Bánffy no sooner learnt the visit of the King to

the frontier, than satisfied that there was no public and natural cause for such a resolution, the truth instantly flashed upon him ; and for a few moments as he stood with the letter of his friend clutched tightly in his hand, his cheek flushed to crimson, and his teeth set, he forgot his allegiance to his sovereign, and cursed in his heart the selfish levity which cost him such a pang as that of parting for the first time from his young wife.

When he grew more calm, he passed out into the free air, and summoned to his side his Seneschal, Benedict Cheneházy, a man of trust and courage, who had grown gray in the service of his father, and whom he regarded rather as a friend than a dependant.

It was Cheneházy who had taught him to handle his first weapon in the halls of his ancestors ; and who had been at his side when he wielded it in his earliest field. He knew that the old man loved him ; and he paid him back his affection almost with the devotion of a son. So utter, indeed, was the confidence of Bánffy in the integrity of his Seneschal, that on every compulsory absence from Presburg, he committed to him the charge of

the fortress, with ample powers to enforce the obedience of the garrison; a trust which, in those troublous times, was of immense importance.

When Cheneházy joined him, the Count hastily began to descend the height on which the castle stood; and, traversing the narrow gorge, breasted the opposite acclivity, and stood at length, with his faithful friend beside him, upon the abrupt rock which overhangs the Danube, in the direction of the now-mouldering fortress of Theben.

"We are at last really alone;" said Bánffy, for the first time breaking silence: "neither prying eyes nor busy ears can reach us here." And yet, even as he spoke, the excited noble glared around him, as though he would annihilate some hidden eavesdropper. "Cheneházy, I know not when I have been so moved. Matthias is about to visit Presburg."

"So be it, my good Lord;" was the calm reply: "we have nothing to fear from his scrutiny, and all to hope from his justice."

"Pshaw! you speak idly, old man;" said the Count almost angrily; for he felt at the moment as though the Seneschal should have interpreted his

fears, and understood his meaning : “ What brings him here ? We have no news from Vienna. We have no symptoms of external menace. We have never relaxed in our duties, and consequently need no incentive to increased exertion. What then brings Matthias here ? ”

“ A righteous caution, it may be, my Lord. Not that he doubts your zeal, but that he holds it fitting rather to look himself to his defences than to spend all his best years poring over the painted pages of which he is so fond. Trust me, the garrison will be well pleased to see that he is once more among them.”

“ Cheneházy ;” interrupted the Count ; “ you speak without reflection. If it were, indeed, as a matter of precaution that the King quitted Buda, he would have found more food for his vigilance on the Turkish frontier than with us. Reflect ; you know much of his nature, and should make no ill guess at his motives. Can you discover no other reason for this visit ; which, moreover, for aught that Matthias himself knows, would be as unexpected as it is sudden ? ”

“ I should crave your pardon, my Lord Count ;”

replied the Seneschal; “ for having deemed any other necessary than the warm affection which our great King has ever shewn to yourself.”

“ Ay !” said Bánffy, bitterly ; “ Now we begin to let a glimpse of daylight into our discourse. He has long loved me, Cheneházy, and I have laboured to deserve his love ; but I never asked nor dreamt that he would extend it beyond myself, and wither it into a curse.”

“ My Lord!—what mean you ?”

“ I mean this, old man ;” and he laid his hand heavily upon the shoulder of his amazed companion : “ I mean this ! I have a fair young wife——”

“ Why, this is madness !” burst forth the Seneschal : “ My Lord, my Lord ; you wrong our noble monarch. That he is light of heart, and wild of fancy, I seek not to deny ; but that he should dream loose dreams of the Count Bánffy’s wife—No, no—you cannot, *dare* not believe that he would be so base.”

“ I *dare—I do* ;” muttered the excited Count ; “ Some idle tongue—may fever blister it !—has been telling him tales of Margaretta of Lágán’s loveliness ; and his light spirit has been roused

into curiosity. We know too well, mine old friend, how soon, where beauty is the lure, the curiosity of Matthias grows to crime."

"But your proud name, and your honoured lady's rank—" commenced the Seneschal.

"What is even the name of Bánffy beside that of Corvinus?" asked the Count moodily; "or the rank of the highest subject to one who has his foot upon the steps of a throne? We will waste no further time in cavilling upon the fact, for fact it is; there is a feeling in my breast that assures me of it; but rather seek, in the brief period which is allowed us for decision, to devise some method of averting the monstrous wrong with which we are now threatened, both for the monarch's sake and our own. The race of Bánffy has been too long one of the pillars of the Hungarian throne for its representative to turn rebel now."

"St. Stephen forbid!" exclaimed the old man, clasping his sinewy hands in unaffected horror; "Sooner than see that day I would ask to die under the Turkish chain."

"Better to avert dishonour than to brave it;" pursued the Count in the same moody tone, as

though unconscious of the interruption ; “ In you, Cheneházy, I can trust as in a father. Full well you know that to me the Lady Margaretta is dearer than all else on earth ; and that one polluting breath upon her purity would drive me into madness. Matthias must not see her. His virtue would not be proof against her beauty—and ruin, utter ruin, would be the consequence of their meeting. To-morrow at dawn you must be prepared to quit Presburg, and to escort the Duchess to our palace at Limpach ; and having there placed her under proper and becoming protection return at once to your post, in order that you may be ready to receive the King. The Saints know what it costs me to part from Margaret, even for a few days ; and yet I can discover no other remedy.”

“ Need I say that your poor servant is ever ready to obey all your behests, my honoured Lord ? ” said the Seneschal humbly ; “ or that when you confide to him so precious a charge as that of his noble mistress, his heart swells with gratitude at so signal a mark of trust ? Mine has been a life-long devotion to your house ; and my gray hairs

must plead for me if I venture yet another moment on your indulgence."

" What would you, Cheneházy ?"

" But this, my Lord ; I am an old man, and time has sobered down the boiling current that once urged me on to doubt, and defiance, and suspicion, where my affections were involved ; I now look calmly on, where formerly I should have chafed and fretted like a curbed war-horse. It is not therefore your servant, but his years, which presume to beg of you, my honoured master, to reflect before you take this step. Remember that although the King has acted lightly where ladies were concerned, he has ever done so with their own consent ; and the Lady Margaret ——"

" Man, man ; you will drive me mad !" exclaimed the Count passionately.

" I would only save you from self-blame ;" sturdily persisted the Seneschal ; " The King will not be long ignorant of the motive which has induced you to compel the absence of the Duchess, nor tardy in resenting it as an insult both to his friendship and his dignity ; while to the lady herself it is an affront, my Lord, which she must never learn ;

for it is one that implies a doubt hateful to all the honest of her sex."

"Words! words!" vehemently interposed Bánffy: "I can bear to contemplate any thing but the loss of Margaretta."

"The anger of the King must inevitably involve annoyance, and perhaps disgrace."

"If my wife share them with me, neither the coldness of the court, nor the displeasure of Matthias will be difficult to bear."

"I have done, my good Lord;" said the Seneschal submissively: "I have now only to obey your pleasure; and I will at once make preparations for the safe conduct and careful tendence of my gracious mistress. Have you any further commands?"

"None;" replied Bánffy: "you know all that I would have done;" and then exclaiming bitterly: "*Would have?*—How shall I bear to lose her?" he suddenly strode down the declivity; and burying himself in a thick clump of elms and beeches which stood in the midst of the vines at the hill-foot, he disappeared.

An hour had elapsed ere the Count returned to the castle, when there were traces of care upon his

brow which did not escape the attention of his retainers. Numerous were the conjectures to which his visible emotion gave rise, for since his marriage his mood had hitherto been one of perpetual sunshine ; and the wonder deepened when the intelligence spread throughout the fortress, that the beautiful Duchess, whose very presence had seemed a palladium to the garrison, was to set forth at day-dawn on the morrow for Limpach ; and that Benedict Cheneházy, and fifty picked men from the body-guard of the Count, were to be her escort.

While surmises and regrets were rife throughout the castle, a far more painful scene was taking place in the bower-chamber of the lady. Bánffy shrank for a time from imparting the intelligence which lay heavy upon his heart ; and when he sought her presence, answered all her caresses with smiles and tenderness. Nor was it an easy task that he had imposed upon himself, of banishing the bloom of the fair cheek which rested against his own, and dimming the lustre of those glorious eyes which to him had not their like on earth ; but still less could he brook that another should be the

bearer of the painful tidings ; and thus he had no alternative.

When he entered her apartment, the Lady Margaret was busy with her lute ; but as he crossed the threshold, she instantly laid it aside, and sprang from her seat to bid him welcome ; and then, as she hung upon his neck, she reproached him with a pretty affectation of anger for his unwonted tardiness ; and bade him declare what pleasurable pursuit had so long detained him elsewhere.

Poor Bánffy ! As he looked upon her his heart swelled within him ; and for a moment he believed that, come what might, he must detain her near him, and brave the worst ; but the very consciousness of her surpassing beauty soon convinced him, that if his suspicions were correct, he should by this act of weakness only be accessory to his own shame ; and as he led her to a seat, and drew her fair young head into his bosom, he felt as though he could have wept over both himself and her.

The dreaded tidings were at length told, but the incredulity of the young wife rendered all the eloquence of Bánffy necessary to convince her that he

could really intend to send her from him. What possible cause could exist to render their separation necessary? Did danger threaten him? If so, why was she not to share it? The husband, struggling against his own feelings, scarcely knew how to reply. He dared not tell her the truth. He could not defile her innocence, nor wound her pride by such a tale: and thus he could only soothe, and solicit her compliance, and answer her with evasive words.

“ But Limpach will be so dreary without its lord;” she murmured, as she wreathed her slender fingers amid the clustering hair that fell around his brow; “ and you told me when you took me from my home that you would never leave me, save to follow Matthias to the field: yet now, when all is peace, and that we know not for how short a time that blessed peace may last, you send me from you as though my love grew wearisome.”

“ Did it fail, life itself would be as nothing to me !” whispered Bánffy.

“ Then in what have I offended ?” she asked, as the large tears rained from her eyes, and dropped into the bosom of her husband. “ It is in vain to

tell me that it is not so—I *must* have angered you, or you would never seek to send me hence."

"Do not so wrong yourself, my own sweet love;" said the Count tenderly; "In what could you offend me? You, who are all gentleness. Oh, do not let me see you weep, for with each tear you shed, my heart rains blood! Believe me that I have full and fitting reason for this seeming harshness, which at another season I will explain to you. Nor will our separation be lengthy; I shall count every hour that parts us more jealously than if its sands ran gold, nor shall I know a happy moment until you are once more pillow'd on my heart."

"Then save yourself this sorrow;" persisted the lady. "You tell me that you are not threatened by danger —"

"Cease, Margaret, if you love me;" hurriedly interposed Bánffy; "Seek not to wring my secret from me—enough that my happiness—that *our* happiness—rests upon your departure. A few days will, I trust, restore you to my arms; perchance ere a week is spent, I may myself speed to Limbach to reclaim you; but I pray you to obey me

in this my first request, satisfied that your concession is a trial to my heart, as well as to your own."

"Forgive me if I have seemed to hesitate ;" said the young wife, as she withdrew from the clasp by which she was encircled, and threw herself back upon the cushions of the couch in an agony of tears ; "But the first trial is so difficult—the first illusion so painful to dispel ; I had hoped that you could not live without me ; for you had often told me so, and I never looked to be undeceived."

Bánffy started from his seat in violent emotion, and for a moment he questioned the policy of his own resolve. Should he tell her all, and trust to her love and to her pride for a release from his anxieties ? But no, no—he could not—he dared not. The dew was so beautiful upon the blossom which he sheltered in his bosom, that he could not brook that any hand should scatter it.

Another painful hour went by ; and although the young Duchess was at length all submission to his will, there was so evident a suffering in her obedience, that for the first time the Count felt how bitter a pang affection may entail. He knew that

the mystery which induced her departure wounded her almost as much as the separation that it involved; and yet he could not explain to her its nature, without wronging both himself and his sovereign; for he was aware that should his suspicions indeed prove unfounded, and his wife guess at their import, she would hold herself to the full as much aggrieved by his want of confidence in her honour, as Matthias at the groundless belief in his own want of moral principle.

Their parting was consequently bitter in the extreme; and as Bánffy folded his beautiful Margaret to his bosom, and heard her choking sobs, he felt that the more brief the trial could be rendered, the more merciful it would be to both; and accordingly he signalled to his Seneschal, who stood by anxiously waiting the event of the struggle, and who received the half-fainting Duchess in his arms, and bore her to the litter which was to convey her to Limpach.

Only four days after the departure of the lady, the King arrived at Presburg; but Cheneházy had made such good speed, by travelling day and night on his return, that he was already at his post; and

as the royal train swept across the bridge of boats opposite the citadel, he was the first to apprise the Count of their approach.

Gorgeous in all his tastes, and magnificent in all his arrangements, the cortège of Matthias was always splendid ; but the quick eye of the husband, rendered more keen by the suspicions which had grown up in his breast, was not slow to discover that on this occasion the personal appearance of the monarch was even more studiously and elaborately costly than he had ever before seen it. By a critical and fastidious eye Corvinus would not perhaps have been deemed a strictly handsome man ; but there was a proud bearing about him, and a visible consciousness of that “divinity which doth hedge a king,” that gave to his whole appearance a gallant and graceful air, which he had only too frequently proved to be eminently attractive to the other sex.

On the present occasion he was sheathed in a suit of Milan armour, its bright links of steel contrasted with the gold enamelling in which it was wrought throughout ; while over his shoulders he wore a national Hungarian pelisse of crimson cloth,

doubled with sable, and secured about his neck, and across his ample chest by a broad strap studded with jewels. The heron plume in his cap was as white as snow, and fastened with a huge opal, which looked, as the light flashed upon it, like a concentrated rainbow. His horse-gear and his weapons were equally gorgeous; and as Bánffy respectfully held his stirrup for him to alight, he breathed a thanksgiving to his patron saint, that he had removed his fair young bride from so dangerous an atmosphere.

Several contemporary portraits of Corvinus still exist; but, as is too frequently the case with the miscalled "likenesses" of celebrated persons, there are no two among them which bear the slightest resemblance to each other. Verbal pictures, drawn by writers who flourished in his time, describe him as of middle stature, with curling hair of a vivid auburn, inclining towards red; large, keen, black eyes, full of fire and expression, suffused in moments of passion with a tinge of blood; a high complexion, a straight nose, a large mouth, redeemed from its want of proportion by teeth of unusual beauty; and the gaze of one whom no man could

overawe. Those whom he loved he looked on fixedly; and happy was the courtier who met the large eye of Matthias turned steadily upon him; but where he disliked the individual, he glanced aside, as if to escape a disagreeable object. He was firmly and broadly moulded, with an appearance of great muscular strength, combined with a certain degree of gracefulness, which gave an added charm to his fine and martial bearing; and his horsemanship was remarkable, even in a land where every noble was a warrior, and the foot as familiar to the stirrup as the hand to the steel.

“I thank you, my good Count Nicholas, for your welcome;” said Matthias, as he moved forward, leaning on the shoulder of the noble, into the hall of the castle; “and shall remain your guest during my stay at Presburg; where, although public business has brought me, I trust that you will help me to make the time speed by pleasantly. You have a wide home here, Sir Count, and it is doubtlessly agreeably peopled.”

“Loyally, at least, my liege;” replied Bánffy; “although somewhat scantily; for we can only offer to your Majesty the welcome of trusty sol-

diers, and such diversion as arms and the chase may offer."

"Indeed, Sir!" said the monarch, as a shade of displeasure gathered upon his brow; "My frontiers are in truth well guarded, if my nobles turn hermits in my citadels, and suffer no gentler pleasures to interfere with their public duties. And yet it struck me that I remembered, about a year back, to have learnt the marriage of Nicholas Bánffy with the young Duchess of Lágan. I was then deceived."

"Your Grace will pardon me;" said the Count with considerable embarrassment; "Such was indeed the fact; but the Lady Margaret is now sojourning at her palace at Limpach."

"An unfortunate coincidence, my Lords;" said the King, addressing himself to some of his attendants, who were listening with considerable amusement to the dialogue; while the red spot burned upon his cheek, which was with him a sure token that his temper was rapidly giving way: "Has the Duchess been long an inmate of Limpach, Sir Count, if you will permit us the inquiry?"

"A few days only, your Grace."

"We are indeed unfortunate, gentlemen;" said

Matthias again, in an accent of intense bitterness. “No domestic feud, I trust, my Lord? for you have ever been esteemed a man of gallantry, and rumour said that the lady whom you had won was well worthy of the homage.”

“I thank your Grace for your condescending solicitude;” said Bánffy, with considerable haughtiness; “It was no cause of displeasure on either side which took the Duchess to Limpach.”

“Why, you are in that case even a greater philosopher than some of our students at Buda;” laughed the King, but still in the same spirit of angry scorn: “for there are few among them, scholars though they be, and nominally wedded to their books, who would voluntarily deprive themselves of the society of a young, fond woman. You must have had some very valid reason for such self-sacrifice, my Lord.”

“The Lady Margaret’s health, my liege, required the change;” said Bánffy: “The air is keen upon this height, and the position of Limpach is more mild and bland.”

“Which must be an advantage in the month of June;” remarked the King drily, as he flung

aside his plumed cap ; “ And now, my Lords, to the banquet.”

“ Your Grace has driven our host to the very end of his wit ;” observed one of the courtiers by whom he was attended, when, after the evening meal, Matthias strolled out upon the ramparts of the castle ; “ and I will wager my dagger-hilt that he now repents having dispatched his dainty young Duchess to Limpach, out of the way of your Grace.”

“ How, Sir !” exclaimed the King haughtily ; “ What mean you ?”

“ I pray your pardon, my liege ;” said the noble, delighted at the effect of his remark : “ I should have better measured my words.”

“ It is, however, now too late to do so, my Lord ;” was the King’s retort. “ What possible connexion could my visit to Presburg on the business of the State have with the departure of the Duchess ?”

“ Assuredly none, in point of fact, my liege ; but they tell me that Bánffy deemed otherwise, and believing that his beautiful young wife had been the loadstone which drew your Grace from Buda, he resolved to secure her safety by her absence.”

“ Now, by St. Stephen ! you try me beyond my

patience, Sir Baron!" vehemently exclaimed Matthias, who was the more chafed by the implication against his morality that he felt it to be deserved. "It is impossible that Nicholas Bánffy can have done me this dishonour."

"I but inform your Grace of the rumour throughout the castle; and it is certain that the Count had no sooner learnt by a trusty messenger your intended advent, than he forthwith hurried away the Duchess, who was lifted into her litter in a fainting state, and deluged in tears; while it is moreover asserted that the Seneschal who was her escort, had it in charge from his master to make such arrangements at Limpach as should secure her comfort and convenience for a long period; that, in the event of your Grace protracting your residence in Presburg, she might be well cared for, without the necessity of absenting any of his followers from the fortress during the royal sojourn."

"By the right hand of St. Stephen! this insolence passes belief;" shouted the King, thoroughly furious. "My Lord of Bánffy shall repent this moral treason, if I have another day of life." And striding hastily into the castle, he imme-

diately shut himself into his apartments for the night.

On the morrow no one who looked upon Matthias could doubt the mood of mind in which he came forth ; and the morning meal had scarcely been removed, ere he summoned the Count Nicholas Bánffy to render an account of his government, and of the internal economy of the fortress ; and despite the well-ordered and perfect condition of both, he found cause for blame in every measure that had been adopted ; and even carried his severity so far as to remark that as things were then situated he scarcely felt secure of his personal safety, the fortress being almost as much in the power of the Emperor Frederick as in his own.

In vain did Bánffy endeavour to justify both himself and his measures ; the more perfect his exculpation became, the more virulent grew the displeasure of the King ; who, conscious of his own injustice, and to the full as angry with himself as with his General, only increased in violence as the investigation proceeded. At length, however, the public business drew to a close ; and the calm and dignified self-respect with which Bánffy had borne

the unmerited accusations and insinuations of his Sovereign, as well as the perfect patience and submission that he had testified throughout the whole proceeding, while it had compelled the wondering admiration of the by-standers, had only increased the exasperated violence of the Monarch.

But the scene soon changed when Matthias, unable to find further cause of rebuke in the government of Bánffy, and equally unable to control his temper, wound up his vituperations by exclaiming: "I have, however, been as greatly to blame as yourself, my Lord Count, in confiding one of my most important frontier-fortresses to the authority of a subject who has lost respect for my person both as a man and as a Sovereign."

"Nay, now your Grace surely jests with me!" said Bánffy.

"Jest, Sir Count! Do I look like one who jests?" asked the King fiercely. "It was perhaps then also in pleasantry that you dispatched the Duchess of Lágan in all haste to Limpach when you heard of my approach; as though the contact of Matthias would be pollution to the Count Bánffy's wife!"

"And if I did so ;" retorted the noble with equal violence ; "was I not at liberty to act as I thought best with the members of my own household ? I have stood here to-day, King Matthias, and boasting as I do some of the proudest and the most ancient blood in Hungary, I have nevertheless submitted to insult, invective, and injustice ; for your Highness blamed me only on matters wherein you are the master : but when you touch my honour, and question my right to exert my authority in my own family, I speak to you no longer as a subject to a sovereign, but as a man to his fellow-man ; and I here declare that I hold myself as free in my own castle as Corvinus in his kingdom, and that I will die rather than permit an infringement of that freedom ; nor will I upon this subject weigh my words, as I felt myself in duty bound to do when I spoke only as a public officer."

"How, Sir !" exclaimed Matthias, starting from his seat, and striking his clenched hand violently upon the table near which his chair had been placed : "Am I to be bearded by one of my own nobles ? Was not the insult which had been offered to me before my arrival already more than sufficient,

without this added insolence? But I waste words, my Lords, when my dignity as a monarch calls upon me to act. Where is the Captain of the castle-guard?"

Cheneházy stepped forward.

"Relieve the Count Bánffy of the sword which he is no longer authorized to use;" said Matthias haughtily; "and let him select the place of confinement which he may prefer within the fortress. You, sir, will be held responsible for his safe custody."

The Seneschal did not move a limb.

"Am I to be obeyed?" shouted the King.

"Your Grace is master here;" faltered out Cheneházy, whose consternation had for a moment rendered him speechless: "I would only ask permission to leave the hall for an instant ere I obey your Highness's commands."

And without awaiting the reply of the Monarch, the heart-stricken Seneschal quitted the presence. In great haste he immediately collected the garrison of the citadel, and reminding them of their oath of allegiance to the Count, and of their duty of obedience to himself, he ordered them to make preparations for instant departure, at the same time

placing in the hand of his lieutenant a sum of money to discharge all arrears of pay.

This done, he returned to the hall with the keys of the fortress in his hand, and bending his knee before the King, said firmly : “ These keys, which I now offer to your Grace, were confided to me by my feudal lord, the Count Nicholas Bánffy, here present ; and when I received them in charge, it was with a solemn oath to preserve them faithfully, and to defend their possession with my life. To no one was I to surrender them, unless on the intelligence of my Lord’s death, or of his captivity. The heavy news of the last-named misfortune has reached me within the hour, and I yield them up, according to my oath, to my Lord and Sovereign ; but with them I also deliver over my rank in the fortress ; for that I should carry out the sentence of your Grace, my duty, the laws of my country, and my feudal obligations, render impossible.”

As he spoke, the Seneschal rose from his knees ; and before Matthias had time to utter a sentence in reply to this firm but respectful address, Cheneházy had again left the hall, hastened to the court-yard, where the troops were already awaiting him, and

placing himself at their head, marched out of the citadel towards Limpach.

The excitement within the castle was intense when the absence of the garrison was discovered, as the nobles quitted the hall of audience, and re-appeared upon the ramparts; and the universal sympathy which had been felt for Bánffy was blent with admiration for the spirited devotion of his servant. Matthias himself was so struck with the noble bearing of the Seneschal, who had every reason to believe that his attachment and respect for his master must involve his own ruin, that when one of the courtiers suggested that he should be pursued and brought back, he rejected the proposal; and commanded that he should be permitted to pursue his journey without molestation or impediment; but his leniency towards Cheneházy did not affect his wrath against the Count, who had been conveyed to one of the dungeons by a less scrupulous jailor; and whom, on his departure for Buda, he caused to follow in his suite in one of the common waggons of the country.

Cheneházy meanwhile arrived in safety at Limpach with his followers; and having forbidden them

on-punishment of death to reveal to the Duchess the evil which had fallen upon her lord, he demanded to be admitted to her presence; and after having greeted her tenderly in the name of the Count, and given her favourable intelligence of his health, he informed her that his master, having discovered that her absence from Presburg must be longer than he anticipated at her departure, had deemed it expedient to dispatch him to Limpach with an increased force, in order to secure her safety and comfort.

With bitter tears did the young wife receive this unwelcome message ; and so many and so various were her questionings, that it required all the ingenuity of the devoted Seneschal to preserve his secret. How had her husband looked when he watched them forth of the fortress ? How was he occupied ? What did he last direct ? Would he soon join her at Limpach ? Cheneházy continued, however, to answer all these queries with a sufficient show of probability and readiness to satisfy the Duchess, whose whole soul was engrossed by affectionate solicitude ; and although there was a moment in which she could not avoid a feeling of astonishment that Bánffy should not have sent her one line from

his own hand which she might have read and re-read, and thus enlivened for a time her enforced solitude, she would not give utterance to the murmur, lest it should wound the devoted follower, who loved him as his own son, and in whom he had the most perfect confidence.

But when for two long and weary years (for even to this time did the imprisonment of the Count extend), the Seneschal found that his work of pious deception must continue, he required no prompting to convince him that the unfortunate Duchess must sooner or later suspect some fraud, did she not receive written tidings of her husband ; and accordingly, with the assistance of one of his people, who chanced to be more scholarly than was common at the time, he contrived so cleverly to imitate the writing of Bánffy as thoroughly to deceive his wife ; and thus was maintained a correspondence which tended to relieve the solitude of the Duchess of half its tedium and unhappiness, while it accounted, from time to time, for the prolonged absence of her lord, by such specious pretexts, that she never once suspected how long and zealously she had been deceived.

The illegal imprisonment of one of the first and most powerful officers of the crown created a great excitement throughout the country, and considerably increased the discontent which several unusual and severe proceedings of the King towards other individuals had already tended to produce ; while the Austrian Emperor, ever on the alert to harass and annoy his chivalric neighbour, and to instigate the native magnates to acts of opposition and aggression which might render his own interference necessary, and ultimately secure to him the crown of the convulsed country which he had so long coveted, did not fail to exasperate the angry feelings of Bánffy's powerful connexions ; and to make the few Hungarian nobles at his court deeply sensible of the humiliation to which he had been subjected.

Through the medium of his secret agents he contrived to correspond with several influential magnates, and among others with the Count Jacob Bánffy, whose family pride and fraternal affection had alike been wounded by the captivity of his brother Nicholas ; and whose self-respect had also been so deeply stung by the peremptory and unconciliating

manner of Matthias when he had sued to him for the liberation of his kinsman, that he cherished towards the sovereign a bitterness which only awaited its fitting moment to explode.

The public fermentation was increasing visibly ; and the war in which Matthias was engaged with Podiebrad of Bohemia required so many troops to render it at all effective, that he found himself compelled to leave his own kingdom without any adequate protection ; and then it was, that—wary of the solicitations and murmurs by which he was constantly assailed on the subject of the Count Bánffy's captivity, though he had never himself condescended to utter one word of expostulation or entreaty, bitterly as he felt an imprisonment by which he was separated from his beautiful young wife,—Matthias, urged also, it may be, by a voice within him which could not be silenced, suddenly commanded, not only the liberation of the Count, but also his re-instatement in all the honours and dignities that he had enjoyed previous to his captivity.

After a brief acknowledgment to his sovereign, Bánffy hastened with a beating and a bounding

heart to Limpach, and to the arms of his wife; and great was his astonishment when, after she had tenderly embraced him, and bedewed him with the happy tears of confiding ard rejoiced affection, she began to comment with wondering regret upon the wrinkles which were traced upon his noble brow, and the long beard, touched with gray, that he had allowed to grow uncared for, during his long imprisonment; and with deep emotion inquired what these signs of mourning might portend, when nothing evil could have occurred to him.

The reply of the Count was one of reproachful tenderness, as he inquired in his turn whether two weary years in a loathsome dungeon, absent from all that he loved best on earth, were indeed no misfortune? And as Margaretta echoed the word “Dungeon!” in a shrill accent of agonized surprise, Cheneházy stepped forward; and with the honest suffusion of conscious rectitude upon his brow, in a rapid and agitated tone explained the mystery, and declared that he was the author of the correspondence by which the lady had been deceived into tranquillity.

Tears of gratitude burst from beneath the eye-

lids of the emancipated captive, and mingled with those which suffused the glowing cheeks of the Duchess; and as the Count folded the faithful Seneschal to his heart, he placed the hand of the Duchess in that of his devoted follower, and exclaimed : “ Henceforward, Margareta, the Castle of Presburg must have a new Castellan ; for our friend and brother Cheneházy is now lord of three villages on my domain ; and from this hour the names of master and of servant must be forgotten between us.”

CHAPTER II.

"I AM glad;" said the host, when the tale had terminated; "that the good King Matthias has not been entirely overlooked by our whole party; though, sooth to say, he does not figure either royally or creditably in the legend to which we have just listened. He may, however, fairly be forgiven the one blot in his character, for he was a great and a brave monarch; Magyar both in blood and feeling; and they who would chronicle his reign must have skill in book-lore as well as chivalry."

"Even admitting your position to its fullest extent as regards both;" observed the Baron Pratnayer; "I cannot, nevertheless, agree with you in describing his passion for the sex as the only blot upon his memory. His ambition was devoid of principle; and many of his measures were both arbitrary and unjustifiable. It is true that these were the vices of his age; but as he boldly and un-

hesitatingly flung aside many of its prejudices, he cannot be altogether exonerated for retaining its darker features. His conduct towards the uncle to whom he was principally indebted for his crown, was alike unnatural and ungrateful : he was jealous of his temporary control, and to rid himself of restraint, flung him into a prison. I have no wish to deny that when Szilagzi had effected his escape, Matthias expressed himself ashamed of his injustice, and was immediately reconciled to him ; but at the same time it must not be forgotten that he had in the interval accomplished his darling project of free and unrestricted sovereignty, and that consequently he had no motive for maintaining his original jealousy.

“ All this is certain ;” said M. D’Eödenffy ; “ and yet there was so much that was both good and great about Corvinus, that one strives to forget his defects. His whole life was a romance. Not even heir to a kingdom, he was proclaimed the sovereign of a free people at the early age of fifteen, when he was actually a prisoner at Prague ; and even his liberation was not effected without his acceptance of a wife being made its condition.”

"Nor did the romance of his existence terminate, as is frequently the case, with his marriage ;" smiled the Prussian : " for a few years subsequently we find him, unsatisfied with the sovereignty of one nation, striving to possess himself of the throne of another, even although that other is governed by the father of his consort. But I will not allege any further charges against him. With all his faults, Hungary has cause to be proud of Corvinus."

"He was the most magnificent monarch who ever wore her crown ;" said the host enthusiastically ; " and if his splendid undertakings have failed to profit the country as they should have done, it is to the supineness of his successors that the failure is attributable. Look at the extraordinary advance he had made upon his century. Not only was he one of the bravest spirits and the ablest generals of his time, but he was at once an accomplished sovereign and a learned student. In the field he was bold and chivalrous ; in the council, fluent and graceful ; and in the closet, learned and profound. Perhaps no individual of his time excelled him in a knowledge of languages. His Latin

correspondence with Ficinus is matter of history ; and it is equally well ascertained that, in addition to the Latin, he was deeply versed, not only in his native idiom, but also in the German, Sclavonic, and Turkish languages. He was intimately acquainted with the classics ; familiar with Frontinus and Vegetius ; extraordinarily well read in the scriptures, from which he could quote without error or hesitation ; and greatly addicted to astrology. His greatest recreation after a day of public labour was to read, for several hours after he had retired to rest, and knew that he was safe from interruption ; but he never suffered his love of literature to interfere with his more active duties."

" He must, indeed, have been one of those of whom it has been tritely said, that he created time rather than killed it ;" remarked Pratnayer ; " if we may rely upon the assurances of his chroniclers ; the most recent of whom, as well as one of the most interesting, is the Count Mailáth, who in his history of the Magyars has done ample justice to his subject ; and who makes honourable mention of the persevering habits of business of this extraordinary man ; and shows that the regularity with

which his extensive correspondence was carried on, might be an example to the statesmen of the present day. Among the specimens given of his epistolary style, I was particularly struck with that of an autograph letter still in existence, addressed to his metropolitan subjects on some occasion when he needed their assistance; and which ran briefly thus:—‘ Matthias, by God’s grace, King of Hungary. Good Morrow, citizens. If you do not all come to the King, you lose your heads.—Buda. The King.’ There is something fine in the daring absolutism of such an address to a warlike people like the Magyars.”

“ It was that very resoluteness of feeling and action that endeared him to the country;” said the host. “ He was no less the brother than the general of his troops; and the labours of the closet never unfitted him for the duties of the camp. He not only visited the sick, and administered their medicines with his own hands, but frequently after a battle he himself bound up the wounds of the sufferers; spoke hope and praise to the desponding; and so inspired the timid, that his army was an army of heroes, to whom his will was law, and who

more feared his frown than any death, however terrible."

"What a magnificent conviction!" exclaimed Pálffy, for the first time mingling in the conversation. "It must have been a foretaste of perpetual victory."

"He was also the Haroun Alraschid of Hungary;" followed up the host; with whom, in common with all his countrymen, the subject was a favourite; "and anecdotes are told of him which are as creditable to his courage, as they are curiously demonstrative of his ingenuity. Once, disguised as a sutler, he stood for a whole day before the tent of the Ottoman General, in the midst of the enemy's camp, selling savoury meats; and the following morning he wrote a letter to the amazed and bewildered Moslem, informing him that he had personally explored the Infidel camp; and enumerating, in corroboration of his statement, the dishes which had been served at the Pasha's table; who, believing that he had to do with one of the agents of Sheitan, struck his tents and fled."

"An equally admirable anecdote is related of

him ;" said the Prussian ; " of which I have heard it asserted, that a memorial was left by the Hungarians in Vienna, though I am ignorant if it still exists. Mailáth relates (you will pardon me for again quoting him, as I feel convinced that my so doing requires no apology), that during the siege of the Austrian capital, Matthias entered the city in disguise ; and after traversing its busy streets for a considerable time, at length seated himself to recover from his fatigue ; but while he was reposing, a rumour suddenly grew about him that Matthias was within the walls ; and instantly every eye and brain were on the alert to take him. After discussing the probability of the rumour with those immediately in his vicinity, he rose calmly from his seat ; and remarking that he could afford no further waste of time, he lifted from the ground a wheel with a broken spoke, which chanced to lie near him, and trundling it before him, traversed the streets leading to the walls, passed out at the gate, and returned in safety to his own encampment. Mailáth goes on to tell that, when Vienna was taken, the Hungarians commemorated this exploit of their idolized monarch, by carving his effigy in stone,

and erecting the image on the spot where he had sat down to rest."

"No wonder that both Catherine and Beatrice were so devoted to him;" murmured the Countess Adèle, whose embroidery silks Pálffy was busily employed in tangling into a maze which might well have baffled the skill and patience even of the handmaidens of Penelope herself.

"Courage is ever the touchstone to a woman's heart;" said the Prussian Baron.

"And yet wondrous courage may be exhibited in a bad cause;" observed a scion of the noble house of Zrinyi, who was seated near him; and as I find that I am fated to be the next chronicler of our country's fortunes, I will e'en take that assertion for my text; and prove it by the history of one of the most distinguished of my own ancestors, and the life of the famous

JOHN OF SASVAR.

There is probably no attachment more ennobling, or more calculated to incite to great and heroic actions, than a love of fatherland—a veneration for the soil of our ancestors and of our own birth—an

elation at the glory of our national prosperity and our national renown. Patriotism is the nurse of honour ; and no man can be “all evil,” whose pulses quicken and whose heart bounds at his country’s welfare. But woe be unto him who becomes so lost to every noble impulse as to suffer his own selfish interests or vindictive passions to annihilate within his breast that pure and holy sentiment ; for a barrier is then overthrown through which rush in a host of evil influences, that, if they be at first unchecked, will ultimately destroy every goodly edifice of principle and high-heartedness which should have been their efficient checks.

A period of foreign aggression and foreign sway is one which peculiarly develops individual character, and stirs up the latent qualities of men’s minds. It has ever been under oppression that heroes have stood forth, and compelled their country to mirror itself in their greatness. It has always been exotic and repugnant pressure which has banded armies, and made the ocean white with sails —but the struggle has ever been the fiercest when the latter alternative has been denied ; and where a people have been utterly flung upon themselves for

their defence, boasting no sympathy beyond their own barriers, and no strength save that of their bold and holy freedom.

The unfortunate occupation of Hungary by the Turks, while it afforded to many a noble spirit a fine though fatal field for the exercise of its best energies, was also a too propitious season for the growth of more worthless and lamentable qualities of heart and head; and there were many individuals in the country whose ambition or vindictiveness urged them on in a career of crime, and rendered them for a time the scourge and curse of the land to which they owed their birth.

The Infidels, although numerically strong enough to have crushed the nation over which they ruled for a sufficient space to leave as their bequest contagion, ruin, and misery, were yet very inferior in military tactics to the oppressed Magyars; and consequently were always ready to welcome to their ranks such vile adventurers as were content to barter alike their souls' and their country's welfare for renegade titles and Moslem gold. It need scarcely be added, that these were not wanting during the century and a half of Infidel supremacy to

which the land was subjected ; for what soil exists in which the poisonous weed does not spring up beside the bright flower, and the health-giving herb ?

The career of these degraded and desperate men was rendered the more tempting by the fact that all the energies of the country were exerted to suppress the additional dangers which threatened from without ; and that the native nobles, split into factions, someavouring the advances of the Austrian Emperor ; others endeavouring to support their native King ; and others again making their own personal jealousies and ambitions the corner-stone of their actions, had little time to spare to reflect on the delinquencies of individuals, and still less to suppress them ; and the natural consequence ensued—that many brave men, who, had their impulses been properly directed, might have proved a bulwark and a blessing to their country, suffered their evil passions and wild love of power, to hurry them into excesses and treason by which they became its scourge.

Such a one as this was John of Sásvár, who, during the year 1556 earned for himself a name

which will never be forgotten in Hungary; and affixed the first blot in the noble escutcheon of an ancient family in the province of Ugot, which had long been celebrated for its chivalric loyalty, and for many a bold and successful exploit against the Turks.

Sásvar had inherited all the courage and daring of his race; but he had been an only child, and from his earliest years accustomed to see all bow down before him. His extreme beauty and gallant bearing, when in his first youth he trod the halls of his father's castle, and pursued the savage animals of prey over his paternal domain, engendered many a glorious prophecy of his future career, which were only fulfilled in part, and that most darkly; for as he grew in strength and manly grace, the tares of self-will, self-reliance, and haughty recklessness sprang up so thickly upon the ungrateful soil of his character, that the milder and more noble virtues were soon smothered and destroyed; and the handsome John of Sásvar, the child of a mother's pride and the heir of a father's hope—the man whose rank made him the legitimate property of an oppressed and suffering land, and whose

natural fearlessness would have rendered him a valuable soldier, was fated to be another example of perverted powers and impious misrule.

The commencement of his career was brilliant; and until the death of his father, who perished from the effect of wounds inflicted by the Infidels, he emulated the noble deeds of his ancestors, and excited among his friends hopes which were never to be realized. Successes shared by half the loyal nobles in the land did not suffice to Sásvár; his ambition aimed at a wider triumph. It was with extreme difficulty that he had ceded obedience to his own father; and when he found himself in the field, even under the guidance of older and abler soldiers, his proud heart revolted at this implied inferiority; nor was he blind to the fact that the pecuniary embarrassments of his house, and the limited number of his followers, must ever prove a barrier to his attaining such supremacy as he was eager to secure. The slow path of successful chivalry had no charms for his ambition: he panted to be great while the bloom was still upon his cheek, and the hair black above his brow; and he dreamt wild and worthless dreams of attain-

ing this coveted end, be the means what they might.

His widowed mother, subdued in spirit by the death of her lord, to whom she had been tenderly attached, and accustomed from his birth to bend her own will to that of her only son; rather marvelled than mourned over the wild bursts of ungovernable, and to her, mysterious passion, to which she was sometimes witness; and while she saw him before her, strong in the pride of his manly beauty, and brave as his fathers had ever been, she never deemed that evil and shame could darken above the portal of their ancient house.

“And is this all?” would the young Noble ask himself bitterly, as he strode with a bursting heart across his ancestral halls, while his mailed foot, as it fell heavily upon the stone pavement, awoke the echoes of the vaulted space: “This! this one poor fortress, all that John of Sásvar can call his own; while the Pálffys, the Eüdodis, the Bertsénys, and half a hundred others, count hill, and dale, and castle, and stronghold by the score; and gamble them away upon a cast of the dice without heeding their transfer? Yes! such is fortune;

this bat's nest is my home—*mine*—who could scarce breathe freely upon a subject-throne, and should still grasp at empire. *This*—and so poor a train of followers as a Batthiány or an Esterház would whistle after him when he went forth with his falcons! And shall I sit tamely down, content with such à patrimony?"

As he put the question to himself Sásvár paused suddenly, and smote the hilt of his weapon so rudely that the sound rang through the hall; the blood had sprung to his brow, and the fire flashed from his eyes, while the proud lip curled with such a scorn as might have become that of Tullia, when she, like him, was preparing to dishonour all that was left of her dead father.

A moment afterwards a wild and bitter laugh rang out upon the air; and Sásvár folded his arms tightly across his breast, and resumed his solitary walk. His resolution was evidently taken; for every trace of passion had faded from his countenance, and he was buried in deep and earnest thought.

The morrow explained all. Attended by half a dozen of his retainers, the young Baron took horse,

and visited every castle and fortress in the neighbourhood, whose owners were limited either in money or power; and at such a period they were not few. The expedition occupied an entire month, which was grudgingly devoted to it by the impatient Sásvár, but he had no alternative; and within the next his own fortress was made the rendezvous of a band of petty nobles, as reckless and as impoverished as himself, who had consented, under his guidance, to make war on their own account against the Turks, without acknowledging any authority, save that of their own leader.

Their combined forces were far from despicable; and when they commenced operations against the common enemy, overtures were made to them by the recognised generals, which were, however, haughtily rejected; and they established themselves as an independent army, greatly to the annoyance and disgust of their less insubordinate countrymen, who, nevertheless, withheld all interference with their proceedings, being unwilling to sacrifice the general good to a mere consideration of national etiquette.

For a time, the army of Sásvár was highly ser-

viceable to the interests of the oppressed nation, for it was composed of men of great personal courage, as well as considerable mental resources, all which were freely put forth in the furtherance of their ambition ; but as their leader had been careful not to enlist into his force any Noble who was hereafter likely to question his authority, or to oppose his suggestions, he found no difficulty in soon convincing them that there was still a shorter and a surer method of securing to themselves a portion of the spoil, which was daily and hourly wrung from the vitals of the country ; and the transition was a rapid one by which they became, from a banded army harassing and exhausting the Infidel invaders, a troop of titled robbers, to whom the forest-fastness and the mountain-pass were but an arena of spoil and rapine.

Christian and Moslem were alike laid under contribution by this lawless and desperate fraternity ; and on many occasions the injury sustained by the Hungarian soldiery at the hands of the followers of Sásvár, was greater than that which they experienced from the weapons of the Turks.

So dangerous, indeed, did the band become, that

a complaint was formally made to the Imperial court, coupled with an entreaty that steps might immediately be taken for its suppression ; and as the remonstrance which was in consequence addressed to Sásvar by the Emperor, was treated with contempt and derision, the armed force of the country was directed to use every exertion to annihilate the robber-army, without respect to persons, whatever might be their rank.

The order was received with great satisfaction ; and the whole neighbourhood volunteering to aid in the extirpation of the brigands, for such they had literally become, the bold and earnest efforts of Sásvar availed nothing against the multitude by which he was assailed. Hundreds of his followers were slain, the rest fled in confusion, and he himself narrowly escaped with life ; and trusting to his good horse and his lucky star, neither of which failed him, he made his way into Turkey, where he volunteered apostacy, and enrolled himself in the armies of the Sultan.

Not a pang of home-love, or of home-regret, smote upon the heart of the bold bad man, as he resigned at once his country and his faith ! What

were to him the halls of his ancestors, or the mother of his youth, or the altars of his religion ? He had no room in his spirit for things like these ; and his brow never darkened as the turban was wound above it ; nor did his hand tremble when he drew his weapon forth for the first time in the cause of the Crescent !

It was with blended satisfaction and suspicion that Solyman welcomed this new proselyte. His name had long been familiar to the Turks as that of one of their most vindictive enemies ; and yet, now he came, not only willing but even eager to sell himself, body and soul, to the very foes whom he had long loathed ! The Sultan, curious to learn his history from his own lips, commanded that he should be brought before him ; and the interview terminated his doubts : for there was a virulence of hate buried deep within the spirit of Sásvar which betrayed itself in every word. His Christian brethren had prostrated his ambition, and thwarted his plans of self-aggrandizement ; and there was consequently no curse too bitter for his lips to couple with their memory.

Solyman at once understood the character of the

man who had thus sold himself to work out his revenge ! and even while he accorded to him promises of favour and prospects of power, he withheld the personal countenance and distinction which the reputation of the renegade would otherwise have secured from so brave and discriminating a sovereign. Enough was, however, done to reconcile him to his change of principles ; for although the great mind of the Sultan led him to despise the treason of Sásvar, his policy nevertheless induced him to profit by a vindictiveness of feeling which promised to make him a willing as well as a powerful weapon against the Christian.

Two years passed away, and the name of the Apostate had almost ceased to be remembered among his former associates, when an event took place which once more made it familiar throughout the country, and gave to it an infamous celebrity in the annals of the time.

The stronghold of Szathmar, one of the most important fortresses of Lower Hungary, was in the year 1562 besieged by the Turks ; but the extraordinary bravery of its commander, Balassa, kept the Infidel besiegers in check so long and so deter-

minedly, that, weary of the prolonged and profitless struggle, they assembled an immense force under its walls, in order to reduce it at once ; which they calculated confidently upon accomplishing from the moment that Mahmoud Jachiogles, the Moslem general who held the fortress of Szétsée, appeared at the head of their army ; Mahmoud being one of the most celebrated leaders of the Infidel forces. Nor was their trust deceived ; for Balassa, courageous as he was, could not long contend with the overwhelming numbers which were brought against him ; and the coveted stronghold soon saw the crimson banner of the Crescent streaming from the summit of its loftiest tower.

The defeat of his brother rankled at the heart of John Balassa, the governor of the mountain cities : and he no sooner learnt the fall of Szathmar, than he assembled all the nobles of the neighbourhood, with their vassals, and declared his determination either to recapture the fortress, or to compel Mahmoud (who had already retired to his own stronghold) to return in person, in order to defend it. As he approached the castle with his forces, he declared that there would be little difficulty in

regaining it, and planting the banner of the Cross on the proud eminence which was now desecrated by that of the Moslem; but within the first hour of his attack he found serious reason to amend his judgment, for the citadel was in the possession of Mahmoud's favourite lieutenant, the apostate Sásvár, who had sworn a solemn oath that the entrance of a Christian into the fortress should only be accomplished over his own corpse.

Disappointed in possessing himself of the place by a sudden attack, on which he had calculated with all the confidence of a sanguine spirit, John Balassa found it necessary to surround himself by men of tried courage, and to commence a regular siege: which he immediately opened with a couple of falconets, the only artillery of which he was possessed, and the co-operation of some gallant nobles: while Sásvár, on his side, hastily dispatched a trusty messenger to Hassan Bey, the governor of Filck, to demand assistance, which was afforded without delay; but long before its arrival the renegade had found it necessary to exert all his courage, and to put forward all his resources.

When, however, Hassan appeared before the

walls of the beleaguered citadel, it was with such tact and speed that the whole Christian camp was taken by surprise ; while at the same moment Sásvár made so furious a sortie, that the army of Balassa was overpowered ; and it was with great difficulty that many saved their lives by flight.

Pitiable was the fate of those who lost their liberty during the conflict ! Happier far were they who fell upon the ramparts ! Pálffy, Chrusits, Chuti, and Susa—all nobles of high birth and higher reputation—were made captive after a desperate defence, and fell into the power of their ruthless adversary. Chuti was stricken from his horse, and instantly decapitated by a Turkish scymetar ; Matthias was hurled, maimed and bleeding, into the troubled current of the Eipd, where he was drowned ; Torrian, pierced with two-and-twenty wounds, was abandoned on the field ; and Balassa himself escaped almost by a miracle, after having encountered Sásvár in single combat, whom he unhorsed ; but not before the renegade had so disabled him in the left arm, that he could no longer guide the animal that bore him ; which, maddened by the noise and struggle, the blows and blood that

surrounded it on all sides, no sooner found itself released from the controlling hand of its rider, than it plunged violently for a moment, trampling alike upon the dead and the dying, and then galloped furiously from the field.

It were worse than idle to attempt to describe the elation of spirit experienced by Sásvár (or, as he was called among his Infidel comrades, Achmet), at the termination of this fatal contest ; and the bitter and impious joy with which he forwarded to the Sultan a portion of the booty taken in the enemy's camp, all the most important prisoners, and six hundred and fifty Christian heads ; and received in return his nomination as independent Pasha of Szolnok. Thenceforward he became the vassal of the Porte, unalienably and zealously ; and his whole time was spent in expeditions of foray and feud, which soon reduced the immediate neighbourhood of the fortress to one wide ruin ; and rendered him so terrible a scourge to the country of his birth, that many a mother hushed her child to silence by a threat of the vengeance of Sásvár Pasha.

For a long period success waited upon all his undertakings ; and he progressed so steadily in the

confidence of his Infidel associates and the favour of Solyman, that he began to believe in all the wild and vague dreams in which he had indulged during his lawless and wayward youth; but fortune at length abandoned him; and in the year 1566 the horizon of his fate became involved in gloom.

In that fatal year the Sultan marched upon the important town and stronghold of Szigeth, and Sásvár accompanied him at the head of a powerful force, temporarily withdrawn from the garrison of Szolnok.

The town itself was divided into two sections, known as the old and the new towns; the great strength of the castle having induced the enlargement of the original borough; and the modern portion was of essential consequence to the besieged, as it afforded the means of materially annoying the advance of the enemy, and protracting the actual attack of the fortress.

When the Turks approached the citadel, which was held by Count Nicholas Zrinyi (whose very name was loathsome to the Infidels), Solyman was surprised to find the walls hung with crimson cloth, as if in honour of some high festival: and as he

arrived within gun-shot of the ramparts, a single cannon thundered out its welcome, and its defiance to the Moslem horde.

When the smoke had dispersed, Zrinyi assembled his garrison; and in the presence of the troops swore that he would never yield up the fortress while one pulse of his heart yet beat; and having so done, he compelled all the men under his command to imitate his example. He then issued his orders, which were unusually severe, and in every case death was denounced as the price of disobedience. Rebellion against the will of a superior officer; the receipt and secreting of a letter from the enemy; the finding of a letter shot into the garrison with an arrow, or otherwise surreptitiously conveyed into the citadel, and neglecting immediately on its discovery to deliver it up to the commandant; deserting a post; holding secret conversations; or committing theft, however trifling: all these were to be considered mortal offences, and visited accordingly with instant execution. The gates were then safely barricaded; and all the under-growth which might have afforded shelter to the Janissaries, burnt to the ground.

The Moslem army having deployed before the fortress, assaulted the town on three sides: and during the entire day they pressed forward, column after column, so continuously, that the Christians began to look anxiously for the fall of twilight, in order that they might have breathing space, in which to prepare for the onset of the morrow.

But the darkness brought them no respite, for the Infidels never relaxed their attack throughout the night; and among the most determined and the most virulent of the besiegers was Sásvár, whose heart burnt within him as he urged on his weary and toil-worn soldiery. Where the fight grew thickest, there stood the renegade, with his reeking sword waving above his head, disputing inch by inch the rudely-contested ground, and panting to carry slaughter and rapine among his countrymen. Wherever he detected a symptom of wavering or retreat, there he redoubled his efforts, and added taunts and reproaches to his threats and blows; wherever he perceived one bolder than the rest, pressing forward with zeal and courage, he added praises and promises to his assistance and support; and so great and so steady was the progress made

by the Moslem ere dawn, that Zrinyi despaired of being able to preserve the new town ; and accordingly set fire to it in order that it should not afford shelter and safety to the enemy ; but the ruins were still smoking, when, at the instigation of Sásvár, the Janissaries took possession of them ; and combating bravely with the suffocating heat and choking vapours, commenced a brisk fire upon the Christians in the old town.

Several desperate attempts were next made by the army of the Sultan to take the citadel by storm ; but although the result was seriously to cripple the strength of their adversaries, they were nevertheless unsuccessful ; for the spirit of Zrinyi was in the cause, and the hearts of his troops were with him.

The gallant Magnate had, however, other evils than fair and open fight against which to contend in his defence of the beleaguered town, for cunning and intrigue were superadded to brute strength and manly prowess. Thanks to the indefatigable inventions of the Grand Vēsir and his brother renegade, Sásvár, writings in the Hungarian, German, and Croatian languages were shot into the

town and citadel with arrows, all tending to seduce the fealty of the soldiery from their legitimate leader; and coupling threats of vengeance in the event of their continued resistance, with promises of protection and reward should they pass over to the service of the Sultan, and cede the fortress to his troops without further opposition.

Nor did the brave Zrinyi himself escape these degrading propositions; and in the hope that avarice rather than loyalty prompted his refusal to vouchsafe any reply to such insulting communications, the Sultan, feeling from day to day the vast importance of the stake for which he was playing, ultimately offered to him the whole of Croatia if he would deliver over Szigeth; but still the Count scorned all answer to the insulting offer, and only fought with the greater desperation, when super-added to religious and national hate, there grew up within his breast the incitement of personal indignation.

A keen and bitter trial, however, awaited the gallant noble; and the first chill of absolute despair fastened upon his heart, when in one of those brief intervals which succeeded each furious onslaught

of the Moslem, he saw the banner of his son floating in the midst of the Infidel horde, and heard his trumpeter peal out from the Ottoman ranks the well-known war-strain of their house! A film seemed to fall over his eyes, and his fingers clutched with difficulty the bridle of his war-horse, and the sword of his country, as he heard a low murmur of consternation pass among the men around him; and learnt from one who stood near that the young Count had been made captive by the Moslem; and that the Sultan had resolved to refuse all ransom for his prisoner, and to barter him only against the possession of the stronghold defended by his father.

“Then must he wear the chain of the Infidel;” said the brave and loyal Zrinyi, when the tale was told; “for even to save him I cannot be a traitor to my sovereign and to myself.”

Happy would it have been for the fond parent had he known that his noble boy had not only escaped, but had reached in safety the camp of the Emperor; and that merely his standard-bearer and trumpeter had fallen into the hands of the Turks; but he was fated to be himself their victim without having lived to ascertain the joyful truth.

Rendered frantic by his error, Zrinyi hoped in vain that reinforcements from the main army might arrive to support him ; and that thus the Infidels might be repulsed and scattered. Day however succeeded day, and still no relief appeared ; while he could not conceal from himself, if thus abandoned to his fate, what that fate must be. But his resolution never faltered ; his exertions never abated. Again the Moslem army stormed the citadel, and again they were driven back with immense slaughter ; the ex-Pasha of Egypt fell mortally wounded while endeavouring to save himself by flight ; and two of the Infidel standards were captured by the Christians.

Nothing could exceed the rage of Sásvár ; who, at a council held in the tent of the Sultan upon the morrow, reminded his master that two days thence would occur the anniversary of the battle of Mohács and the consequent capture of Buda and Belgrade ; and ended by predicting that on that day the Turkish arms would conquer before Szigeth, and the star of the Padishah prosper. The Sultan received the prophecy most graciously, and rewarded the prophet with a costly ring from

his own sacred finger ; declaring at the same time that should the oracle prove true, it should be so richly remembered, that the Pasha of Szolnok would have no reason to rue its utterance ; a declaration which the renegade received with bended knee and bowed-down head, and with a hearty prayer that thus it might indeed come to pass.

The day came ; and again the Infidels rushed to the attack, only to be repulsed. They had to encounter hopeless and desperate men who were fighting for life, or for all that could make life precious ; and who were led on by a General anxious at once to serve his country, and to revenge himself ; and so much did they suffer from their reverse that it was several days ere they again hazarded another attempt. They had, however, learned wisdom ; and the lesson had been written in defeat and blood, characters well calculated to render it impressive, since they undertook the conquest of Szigeth ; and it was consequently, with all their available force, and with a care and caution which they had not hitherto vouchsafed to display, that they made their last advance upon the fortress.

Fortune seemed to waver between the Christian and the Infidel. The one army emulated the bold and resolute bearing of the other ; and all was slaughter and uncertainty, when Sásvár, to whom the locality was familiar, introduced himself secretly into a spot whence he could fling fire among the buildings within the fortress ; and ere long, to the joy of the besiegers, and the consternation of the besieged, dense and heavy clouds of smoke began to deploy themselves, and were rapidly succeeded by a gush of flame within the walls of the ill-fated citadel.

Every effort was made to extinguish the fire, but in vain ; the nature of the buildings, which were principally composed of timber, and their sheltered position, were alike favourable to its progress ; and meanwhile the Turks, profiting by the circumstance, of whose origin they were for a time in ignorance, pressed onward with redoubled fury.

But frightful as was his position, between the foe without and the flames within, Zrinyi did not waver for an instant. Twice did the Turks profit by a breach which they had effected, and enter the burning town ; and each time they were driven

back with immense loss ; when Zrinyi to his horror discovered that the struggling flames were rapidly nearing the powder-magazine, and that they had become too fierce and indomitable to admit one hope of his checking their progress. As this conviction reached him, the Infidels made a third rush towards the breach ; and Zrinyi threatened by this double danger, was compelled to retreat into the inner citadel, whence he poured forth so deadly a fire that he effectually checked the further advance of the enemy.

Solyman, who had retired from before Szigeth on the eve of the second day after the prophecy of Sásvar, had committed the command of his army to the Pasha of Stuhlweissenburg, and Osman the Governor of Caramania ; and he watched for the downfall of the Christian fortress with such impatience, that it seemed as if he had forgotten for a time the weakness incident to his great age. At length, wearied by the protracted siege, he wrote peevishly to his Grand Vēsir, Mehmed Szokoli, a Christian renegade high in his trust and favour, under whose immediate control the invading army had been placed ; and in the usual florid style

of the Orientals he asked, “ Is not this chimney yet burnt out ? And sound not yet the cymbals of conquest ? ”

He did not, however, live to have his question favourably answered, for he expired of apoplexy on the very night that the devoted fortress fell into the power of the Crescent.

Mehmed carefully concealed the death of the Sultan, which might have served as an excuse to many of the Pashas and Beys engaged in the capture of Szigeth, for withdrawing from so perilous and unpromising an enterprise ; but affecting still to receive his instructions from the sovereign, he prosecuted the siege with ever-renewed vigour ; and no doubt entered the minds of any of the besiegers that they were obeying the express commands of the chivalric Solymán.

In the Christian citadel, meanwhile, all was suffering and horror ; but for three days Zrinyi held out bravely, and each individual bore with his own wretchedness as best he might. Never having contemplated the necessity of incarceration within the narrow limits where they were crushed together, the Christian troops had omitted to place

provisions where they were now so much needed ; nor could the circumstance be fairly considered as a blameable omission, for it is certain that no contingency, save the fatal fire that was still steaming and smoking around them, would have sufficed to induce Zrinyi thus to cripple at once the resources and the energies of his troops.

The morning of the fourth day presented a frightful spectacle ; the strong men were faint with famine, and the women and children were lying in groups upon the floor, perishing with thirst and hunger. The deep and stifled sob of manhood, mourning over its love done—*the plaintive murmurs of mothers striving to soothe their wailing infants into a temporary oblivion of their wants—and the shrill cries of children pining for the bread which none had power to give them—*formed the hideous diapason that greeted the ears of Zrinyi at every turn ; while the thunders of the Turkish artillery never subsided for an instant. Yet still, as he moved among them, the undaunted Magyar spoke of hope ; until on casting his eyes towards the southern point of the citadel, he discovered that the same alternative had been again adopted by the

enemy, and that the roof of the tower itself was one mass of flame !

Then, indeed, he felt that all was over, and that the death-knell of the Christians had rung out ; and summoning his chamberlain, Thawz Serenk, he bade him bring forth his most costly garments, and a purse of a hundred Hungarian ducats. He was obeyed in silent astonishment ; and when the dress was produced, he habited himself deliberately and with great care, as though he were about to attend a festival ; and then thrusting into his bosom the purse of gold and the key of the citadel, he said calmly ; “ That will suffice : but I should feel rebuked, even after death, did they who strip my corse complain of want of booty.”

His next care was to select from the four costly sabres which he was accustomed to carry, the one that had been his father’s, and that he had himself borne in his first field ; and having grasped it with a clutch which all who looked upon him felt would be relaxed only in death, he proceeded to the court-yard, where his men awaited him in patient terror, for the flames were making speedy progress, and a horrible death was threatening to overtake them.

" My children!" shouted Zrinyi, as soon as he found himself in the midst of them: " We have little left to accomplish—our duty is almost done—Let us be true to the last to our God and to our country!"

A wild burst of half-frenzied acclamation was the reply; and, taking a shield from his chamberlain, the heroic Magyar ordered that the gates of the fortress should be thrown open. Scarcely was he obeyed ere the Infidels made a rush to enter, when he fired with his own hand a heavy mortar that protected the passage, and the foremost rank fell as though they had been smitten by a thunder-bolt.

With the battle-cry of the Christian upon his lips, Zrinyi flung himself into the midst of the Turkish troops, at the head of all his garrison. A second time he essayed his war-cry; but ere he could articulate a word, two balls entered his breast, and an arrow smote him on the temple. His upraised arm quivered for an instant, and in the next he fell over the body of his standard-bearer, Juranich, who was also a corse.

The exultation of the Janissaries exceeded all

bounds, for there was no possibility of mistaking the identity of their victim: and when Sásvár pressed forward to assure himself that Zrinyi was indeed dead, he commanded that his body should be laid with the face downward upon a cannon, and his head struck off; an order that was promptly and joyfully obeyed.

The scene within the conquered castle was soon too frightful for description: women and children whose allotment produced quarrels among the troops, were slaughtered to terminate the argument: the chamberlain, treasurer, and cup-bearer of Zrinyi were taken alive; their beards rudely shorn from their faces, and burnt; and themselves dragged before the Grand Vēsir, who was anxious to learn in what particular portion of the fortress the Magnate had concealed his treasures. The two former were so exhausted by their wounds, which were still bleeding, that he addressed himself to the cup-bearer, a fair and gallant youth of noble family, who had been greatly beloved by his master. His reply was worthy of his blood.

“Vēsir!” he said firmly; “ere he opened his gates, Zrinyi consumed a hundred thousand Hun-

garian ducats, ten thousand dollars, and a thousand goblets formed of the precious metals. All that remain are five thousand ducats deposited in a chest. But of powder there is still plenty; and the fire which you have yourselves ignited will render that powder Zrinyi's best avenger."

His words needed no interpretation; and the Ishaush Bashi rode off in all haste with his men, in order to take means of averting the mischief; but before he could reach the town, it blew up with a report that sounded like the crashing of a world; and it was soon ascertained that three thousand Turks had fallen victims to the explosion.

His ultimate success at Szigeth, notwithstanding the fearful price at which it was accomplished, determined the Grand Vēsir to attack the Imperial fortress of Ráab; a resolution which he immediately carried into effect, and which was productive of the most disastrous results to the cause of the Crescent; as, during the repulse of the Infidels by the Christian garrison, Osman was killed, Mahmoud himself taken prisoner, and the whole Moslem army thrown into confusion.

With the rapidity of lightning, Sásvár Pasha

flung himself at the head of the retreating and tumultuous host, and with taunts and threats compelled them once more to obedience ; and then, waving his scymetar above his head, he led them on to the attack of the second division of the Imperial army, which was then advancing to follow up the triumph that had been so auspiciously commenced ; and with loud and shrill cries called upon his men to avenge the defeat of their Pasha. But he was not fated to gather laurels on that field of blood ; for the Lord of Salm, who headed the Imperialist reserve, received him with so warm and fierce an attack, that his men, already dispirited by the death of one leader, and the capture of another, gave way before the furious charge of the Christians like scattered sheep ; and Sásvár was indebted in his turn to the speed of his good horse for his escape.

The disastrous issue of this bold attempt did not tend, among a people who judge from results rather than exertions, to further his ambitious projects ; and there is no record of the renegade Pasha from the battle of Szigeth until the year 1579, when he once more appears upon the scene in the county

of Zemplin, where he attacked and made prisoner the Count Nicholas Drueth of Homonna, with four hundred mounted retainers.

This high-hearted young noble, who was *Obergespann* of his province, lost no opportunity of collision with the Infidels; and on the occasion now described had been incautious enough to pursue them so recklessly as to fall into an ambuscade which had been laid for him by the renegade Pasha; who on his capture, which was not accomplished until his wounds disabled him from further resistance, conveyed him to Szolnok, where he was retained until his health was sufficiently restored for him to be safely forwarded to Constantinople, whither he was in the course of time conveyed under a strong escort.

It was by the capture of this brave Magnate that Sásvar, or, as I will hereafter designate him, Achmet, became possessed of the black charger which ere long grew to be as famous as its rider. It was a scion of that swift and beautiful race which, desert-born, seems to emulate the wind in speed, and the antelope in gracefulness. From forehead to fetlock it had not one white hair to mar the

lustrous surface of its sable coat ; while it was so docile, that ere long it obeyed the voice of its master with an instinct that shamed the reason which so often leads to anarchy and feud.

Achmet attached, moreover, a superstitious value to the noble animal ; for the rarity of its race in Europe rendered its possession, in the eyes of the warriors of the time, an earnest of success.

The apostate Pasha himself had assuredly no cause to doubt the validity of the belief up to the year 1581 ; for until that period it mattered little how desperate were the enterprises in which he engaged, as fortune was sure to attend every adventure in whose issue he took an interest. But 1581 proved less favourable to his grasping and reckless ambition ; for in a marauding expedition near Naduvár, his party were overpowered by the Christians, and himself so desperately wounded that he with difficulty effected his escape.

The check proved only temporary, however ; for his hurts once healed, the restless spirit of the renegade spurred him on to renewed attempts ; and so valuable an ally did he prove to the Moslem, that in 1587 his wildest visions were fulfilled, and

by a decree of the Divan he was made Governor of Bosnia, with authority over the whole nation, questionable by no one save the Sultan himself.

The only drawback to his haughty satisfaction existed in the fact, that as peace was concluded between the Porte and the Emperor of Germany, there were no more fields to be fought. A burning thirst for rapine and violence devoured him like a disease; and he panted at once to revenge himself upon his Christian countrymen, by whom he believed that he had been unappreciated, and consequently wronged (and whom, since his apostacy, he unconsciously feared, even as greatly as he hated); and to distinguish himself yet more in the eyes of the Sultan, and of those among his nobles who still affected to look down in contempt upon the renegade Christian!

For a time he submitted, nevertheless, patiently to the restraint; for the new honours which he had acquired afforded to him a proud enjoyment that satisfied his selfishness: but as these grew more familiar, they became also common-place, and at times even wearisome; and, at length, listening to nothing save the voice of his own base nature, he

resolved to make a descent into Hungary for the purpose of plunder : and afterwards trust to the influence of his lucky star to excuse this breach of peace towards the Emperor by rich gifts from the booty that he felt certain he should obtain ; and to effect his reconciliation with the Sultan through the slaves which he intended to present to him, as a trophy of his prowess.

With all his disposable force, the Bosnian Governor accordingly commenced his operations ; and having reinforced his troops from the garrison of Jaiesa (the capital of Bosnia, which had been conquered by Mohammed, and was garrisoned by seven thousand Turks), he swept the country from the banks of the Murau to the frontiers of Styria. Consternation and terror were his most efficient allies ; for the short period of peace which the exhausted Magyars had been suffered to enjoy, had lulled them into fancied security ; and had, moreover, been so brief, that even the most desponding among them did not anticipate so speedy a renewal of their sufferings. Unprepared, consequently, for outrage, they fled before the insurgents in terror, and without one attempt at resistance, leaving behind

them everything that they possessed, to become the prey of the robbers : until they were opposed by Count George Zrinyi, the worthy and gallant representative of a family in which bravery, and hatred of the Moslem had ever been hereditary qualities.

Exasperated by the cowardly wrong done to his country by an army of freebooters, rebels alike to national honour and to their own sovereign, Zrinyi hastily rallied around him all the friends and followers whom he could collect, and placing himself at their head, advanced to meet and oppose the invaders ; which he did so effectually, that the brigand-army was completely routed ; two thousand men were left dead upon the field, and as many were made prisoners ; while Achmet, confiding in the speed and sagacity of his horse, fled like the wind, and never drew bridle until the animal plunged to the saddle-girths in a morass, whose bright and redundant vegetation had deceived its instinct ; and where in its terror it struggled so desperately that it nearly accomplished the destruction of its rider.

For a weary hour the renegade despaired of being able to disengage himself from his plunging and affrighted horse ; and with the momentary risk

of pursuit and detection, it seemed as though every passing instant were lengthened into an age.

It was a scene for a painter. The bright blue heaven, clear and cloudless, spread above; while beneath, far as the eye could wander, extended the treacherous swamp on the one hand, and a lofty line of mountains upon the other. The marsh itself entailed no monotony on the landscape, for it looked like a fair plain; here shaded by a group of trees, there severed by a line of underwood; while among, and in the midst of these, it was covered with a verdure so dazzlingly green and vivid, that it looked as though it were the growth of a perpetual spring. And amid this magnificent profusion of grass and leaves, the plunging horse, and its tall rider sheathed in glancing armour, and seeming as though they were the victims of some gramarye overtaken by witch-spells in the gramineal waste, were the only objects which produced a discord; for all around looked too fair and too calm to be the fitting arena of human struggle and human suffering.

At the termination of that frightful hour, however, the strife was over; for as Achmet felt the violent

muscular exertions of his trammelled horse subside into the short and quivering spasms of decaying strength, he well knew that he must make a desperate effort to save himself, if he would not share the fate which he now saw was inevitably that of the cherished animal he had so long vainly striven to extricate from the subtle and irremediable danger into which it had fallen : and accordingly, pressing the expiring charger in the direction of one of those clumps of stunted timber to which allusion has been already made, where a deep fringe of reeds bordered the edge of the pigmy island, he slid carefully from the saddle ; and clinging to the rushes for support, succeeded in gaining this welcome but imperfect place of refuge, where he forthwith proceeded to conceal himself among the dense and rank vegetation by which he was surrounded.

As the renegade stretched his weary limbs among the reeds, he turned his eyes wistfully and sorrowingly towards his still labouring horse, whose fiercest efforts had not enabled it to share the resting-place of its master ; and for a time he prayed—a strange disjointed prayer, in which the name of Allah was almost deliriously blent with One higher and

holier—that the gallant beast might yet free itself of the clinging clay, and escape : but suddenly a sound smote upon his ear, like the trampling of war-steeds and the ring of armour ; when, conscious that the immediate vicinity of the animal must betray his hiding-place, he hurriedly drew forth a pistol and fired.

The shot entered the large and glazing eye which was turned fondly, and yet as it seemed reproachfully, upon its master. A strong quiver passed over the whole frame of the beautiful Arabian ; its proud head was once tossed loftily into the air, and then it sank heavily forward, until the dilated and transparent nostrils were buried in the marsh. Resistance was at an end : the buoyancy of animal life was over ; the stately charger had become a mere dead weight, cumbering the yielding clay ; and slowly, almost imperceptibly, it closed over the supine and bulky mass. The marsh received and engulfed its prey ; and ere the sun had set, no vestige remained upon the surface of the morass of the death-struggle of which it had been at once the cause and the witness. The level was restored : the trailing herbage had spread over the spot ; and not a trace was left of the catastrophe.

With the set of sun up rose all the myriad water-fowl that tenanted the marsh ; and faint and tortured as was the fugitive from the agony of his unintended wounds, and the fatigue of the fierce and profitless struggle that he had so long maintained, their shrill and piercing cries almost deprived him of his reason ; and made him the sport of a delirious fancy which framed them into words, and surrounded him with jibbering and reproaching fiends.

It was impossible to bear this mental torture ; and slowly and with difficulty, for his wounds had stiffened, and he was exhausted with hunger, the miserable renegade rose from his recumbent position, and resolved under cover of the twilight to attempt to complete his escape. He had carefully noted the outline of the mountain-chain ; and his predatory habits had rendered him so familiar with their peculiar forms, that he at once ascertained the direction which it would be expedient for him to follow. The great difficulty was to traverse the marsh, which was yawning before him, ready to prove at once his fate and his grave ; and in order to do this with some chance of success, he disengaged himself of his armour and his weapons,

retaining only a yataghan, which he thrust into his bosom. He had lost his boots in the morass ; and his feet were so severely bruised that he was compelled to cut into shreds with his dagger a costly tiger-skin which had been the gift of the Sultan, in order to protect them in some degree during his progress ; and this feat accomplished, he again breathed out a vague and uncertain prayer, and abandoned himself to his destiny.

Great was the toil and terror with which he contrived to make his way from island to island across the marsh ; at times he lighted upon a tract of comparatively firm clay, in which he scarcely found himself buried above his ankles as he passed rapidly over it, without affording it time to yield beneath his weight ; and at others he was plunged knee-deep, and threatened with total submersion ; but as these less friendly spots usually occurred in the immediate neighbourhood of the wooded patches with which the marsh was studded, he contrived by grasping at the reeds and undergrowth, to extricate himself, and land safely upon these seasonable halting-places.

The morass once traversed, the beaten, maimed,

and discomfited renegade had still five days of perilous fatigue to undergo ere he reached Bosnia; where he at length arrived in a most pitiable condition, his clothes almost rent from his back, his arms and armour gone, and himself a mass of wounds and wretchedness.

His star had set for ever !

The waste of human life ; the clamorous complaints of the relatives of those who had fallen ; and, above all, the formal protestation of the Imperial Ambassador to the Sultan, on the breach of the treaty entered into between the two Courts, by the expedition of the Governor of Bosnia, an accredited officer of the Porte ; had prepared the ruin of Achmet long ere he reached his government, a dishonoured and destitute fugitive ; and two days only elapsed after his re-appearance, when a Tartar brought to Jaiesa the firman of his deposition ; and an order that he should proceed forthwith to Constantinople, there to justify his conduct.

The renegade instantly understood his actual position. He was the servant of a despot with whom he was well aware that failure admitted of no justification, even when legitimately and loyally

incurred : in his own case, therefore, he knew that he had only the choice of bribery or the bow-string ; and he naturally and instantly resolved upon the former alternative. Collecting, therefore, all his ill-gotten treasures, in order to purchase the mercy of the ministers with whom he had so often shared the spoils of other victims of State displeasure, he prepared to obey the summons ; while his journey to the capital was considerably lightened by the numerous memories in which he indulged of cases that to him appeared as heinous and as dangerous as his own, and which had been cured by that universal panacea—gold !

But Achmet, the deposed Governor of Bosnia, forgot that he had also once been the Hungarian John of Sásvár ; and that however willing the Moslem may be to avail themselves of the services of an apostate Christian, they never cease to feel that he is a mere renegade, and to hold that every success which he achieves is so much lost to a True Believer ; and thus was it in the case of our hero ; who on his arrival at Constantinople lost no time in dispensing his wealth on all sides, in the vain hope of securing the influence of those who possessed place

and power at the Divan ; and who found every heart as firmly closed, as every hand was freely opened ; and himself abandoned to a fate which was without delay explained to him by an Aga of the Janissaries, to whom had been entrusted the duty of adjusting the silken cord whose link is death.

Daybreak on the morrow was the period arranged for his execution ; and it had been at the prisoner's own earnest request that the precise moment of his fate had been communicated to him. He received the tidings with all the stoical calm of one to whom the turban and the scymetar were a natural heritage ; and then, with one deep and concentrated curse on the false friends who had betrayed him to his destiny, without stretching forth a hand to avert it, even when he had bought their services at a price which might have paid the ransom of a king, he turned away, and retired to a corner of the dungeon where the light failed to penetrate.

For a brief time he sat, and almost involuntarily gave up his whole spirit to the past. He recalled his boyhood in his father's castle ; his youth of prowess against the Infidel : and then, as the mirror of his mind gradually darkened, he remembered

his apostacy, his wild ambition, his persecution of his country and his faith—and next, by an involuntary transition, he glanced towards the future. In the foreground was the bowstring ; and in the distance the eternity of the renegade who had denied his God !

A wild shuddering convulsed the frame of the prisoner—a cold shiver which seemed as though his veins ran ice. He thrust his hand into his girdle. “The last I cannot escape !” he muttered through his clenched teeth : “ There is no pardon for apostacy—I must abide my fate—and, ha ! ha !” And he laughed the laugh which is the very madness of despair—“ *There* I am smitten by a mightier one than myself—neither King nor Kaiser can resist *His* will—But for the first !—there lives not the man who shall lay a polluting and vengeful hand upon John of Sásvár !”

As the miserable victim to his own vices uttered the empty boast, he withdrew his hand, and raising a small phial to his lips, drained it to the dregs; and then sank back upon his straw to die.

But nature was firmer even than his pride. Life was yet busy with the strong man, and retreated

slowly before the subtle drug which eventually destroyed it: pang succeeded to pang; agony to agony; and the death-spasm was still upon him, when the Aga entered his dungeon at dawn, with the instrument of vengeance hanging from his arm.

He had escaped a felon's fate; but he could not evade his well-earned requiem; and his grave was desecrated by the curses of thousands, both Christians and Infidels.

CHAPTER III.

"I WONDER;" remarked the Lady of Revay, looking up from the elaborate piece of tapestry-work on which she was engaged; and leaving her needle for a brief space protruding from the spot that was soon to be occupied by the bright blue eye of a knight sheathed in armour, in whose formation she was then assiduously engaged: "I wonder that amid so many traditions of the past, none should yet have been related connected with the regal ruins of Viségrád, so rife with memories of deep national interest; and assuredly one of the finest objects on the banks of our noble Danube."

"Surely such need no longer be the case;" said the pale student; for we have certainly no spot throughout the country more rife with legendary associations, than the fortress-palace which was honoured in its time by the simultaneous residence of four Kings, and the visits of a Pope and one of the Paleologi."

"Here again;" said the host exultingly; "the

memory of Matthias forces itself magnificently upon us; for gorgeous as the hill-seated pile had previously been, it remained for him to show how much more might yet be accomplished; and to make it, as it indeed became during his reign, the wonder of all Europe. Built upon an arid rock, standing loftily and abruptly on the bank of a mighty river, exposed to every vicissitude of season and of climate, he even compelled nature into obedience, and draped the steep acclivities with shrubs and flowers; while of the palace itself he made so marvellous a spectacle, that the Papal Legate is said to have described it as ‘an earthly paradise;’ no misnomer or exaggeration, if we may believe the account given by Archbishop Olah, who was the frequent guest of his Imperial master; for it must indeed have been in that age, not only unparalleled, but unapproachable. Its spacious courts paved with costly marbles, shaded with lime-trees, and studded with richly-chiselled fountains of red marble, which on occasions of festival ran with wine; its noble statuary; its alabaster wonders; and its wastes of gilding; its staircases eight yards in width, and its saloons forty feet in height; com-

bine to form a vision of splendour which even the present age can scarcely equal."

The enthusiastic old man paused for breath, and was rewarded for his advocacy of the great King by an affectionate smile from his venerable relative ; after which one of the guests inquired whether the Lady of Revay was acquainted with the tradition of Clara, the daughter of Felician Zách ?

" I remember its having been related to me many years ago ;" was the reply ; " and its awful catastrophe still remains upon my memory ; but the details have all escaped me ; and should you be acquainted with the tale, you could not more greatly oblige me than by refreshing my reminiscences."

" I will do so with pleasure ;" said the young man courteously : " It is, as you are probably aware, a legend of the reign of Charles Robert of Anjou, who had fixed his principal residence at Viségrád, where his luxurious Queen, and her worse than luxurious brother, Casimir of Poland, entering greedily into the vices and indulgences of an Italian court, made the noble pile, which in the days of Matthias had resounded only to the shock of steel,

and the feats of chivalry, echo with the wild uproar of licentious revel."

CLARA AT VISEGRAD.

Of the Imperial palace of Viségrád, where kings once feasted, and monks once prayed; where the voice of woman erewhile mingled with the blast of the bugle, summoning the brave and the high-born to the lists of chivalry; and the scream of the eagle, as it planed over the lofty battlements, made a shrill discord with the lute and the song that were breathed out in the bower-chamber; nothing now remains save a spacious and almost shapeless ruin. Time, and the still more ruthless ravages of human violence, have prostrated the stately halls and lofty towers of the far-famed fortress-palace; and where armour glinted, and feathers waved, as the noble and the beautiful swept through its long galleries and gilded chambers, the bat and the owl now take up their abode, unmolested and unforbidden; while the gray lizard and the ground-lark make their dwellings among masses of stone, on one of which the curious stranger may still trace the imperfect

vestiges of costly sculpture, now crumbling into dust like that of the hand that wrought them.

At the foot of the height on which the fortress-palace stands, and immediately on the lip of the rapid Danube, which at this particular spot is wide, and grand, and lake-like in its character, stands a tall tower, which in the eleventh century was the prison of King Salomon, who was invited to Viségrád by his cousin Ladislaus I., in whose favour he had abdicated, but whom he afterwards sought surreptitiously to dethrone ; and who, having been informed of the treachery, veiling his just indignation under an appearance of anxious courtesy, first induced his vacillating kinsman to visit him, and finally imprisoned him in the tower on the river-bank, which was at that period united to the main building by a covered way ; and which even now, after the lapse of seven hundred years, is familiarly called by his name.

Suffered, rather than welcomed by his Hungarian subjects, upon whom he had been forced by Pope Boniface VIII., when on the extinction of the Arpádian dynasty that pontiff declared the kingdom to be a Romish fief, Charles Robert was

indebted for the tranquil possession of his crown to the exhausted condition of the country, and the utter incapability of the people to offer any effectual resistance to the Papal will.

The advent of the Italian monarch sufficed to terminate for a time the evils of war and bloodshed ; but the discovery was soon made that the unhappy Magyars had only exchanged one misery for another ; for to these succeeded immorality, and libertinage of the most unblushing description, from which the very palace of the monarch was far from being exempt, although the immediate circle of the Queen, Elizabeth, was believed to be uncontaminated by the vicious atmosphere about it.

One of the latest struggles for supremacy in which Charles Robert had been engaged previously to the date of our story, had been against Count Matthias Csáki of Trenschin, when he rose in arms against the new monarch, in order to maintain his threatened rights as Palatine of Transylvania. In this attempt he was ably and bravely seconded by his Vice-Palatine, Felician Zách, a man of high courage, noble blood, and haughty impetuosity ; whose sense of honour and of injury were so ex-

treme, that even the impulses of a warm and generous heart did not suffice in any case of personal wrong to restrain a spirit of indomitable revenge, which neither danger nor necessity could restrain.

Zách had been early left a widower with three fair infants: a son still too young to feel all the loss which he had experienced, and two sweet girls in whom their dead parent's beauty promised to be renewed. He was not fated, however, to preserve all these, for the little Zeba pined and sickened when she missed the light of her mother's eye and the sunshine of her mother's smile, and was soon laid beside her.

After the death of the Count of Trenschin, the King pardoned the Vice-Palatine, of whose extraordinary courage and gallantry he was well aware; and having simply bound him never again to appear in the field in arms against him, he loaded him with favours, in order to attach him if possible to his person; adopted his young son as one of his standard-bearers, and gave to Felician himself free access to the Palace of Viségrád.

The hereditary fortress of Zách was situated a short distance lower on the opposite bank of the

river, and crested a steep height which dominated the valley and the glorious river at its foot; and thither, after his reconciliation with the monarch, and the departure of his son, he retired with his remaining daughter Clara, whose young beauty was so extraordinary, that her father, conscious of the laxity of morals prevailing at the time among the magnates and courtiers, and jealous lest a whisper of libertinage should penetrate to her innocent and guileless ears, forbade all access to her, save with his own permission and in his own presence; and committed her to the care of a stately matron, the widow of his late seneschal.

Here she dwelt, lovely and beloved, the joy of her father's heart, and the light of his home. Her ringing laughter made merry music in his ancestral halls; and her light and bounding step was to him more graceful than aught else on earth. Sixteen summers had Clara sported like a young gazelle beneath the sunshine, without pain in the present or care for the future; when on one occasion her father, on his return from the palace, received her fond greetings for the first time with a moody brow.

"Alas! what ails you?" asked the maiden anxiously, as she flung her white arms about his neck, and buried her face in his bosom: "You are ill—I am sure you are; for you have no smile to-day for your poor Clara."

"I am sick at heart, my child;" was the reply of Zách: "I would that you were either less dear or less beautiful, my fair girl, for then I should bear our separation with more calmness."

"Separation!" echoed the maiden, starting suddenly from her father's neck: "It is impossible! Are we not every thing to each other? We cannot part."

"Listen, Clara;" said Zách; "and you will understand that we have no alternative. As I reached Viségrád this morning, I was summoned to the apartments of the Queen. When I entered her presence, Elizabeth was alone with two of her ladies, and she greeted me with a kindness for which I little dreamt that I should be compelled to pay so dear a price. 'Baron,' she said, as she motioned me to approach her tapestry-frame, 'I have just learnt that you have a fair daughter. Why did you never yourself tell me this? I have always hitherto be-

lieved that the graceful boy whom his Highness, my husband, received into his service many months ago, was the only child of your dead wife ; and now I ascertain that there is also a sweet girl, who must surely in her orphaned state require more gentle nurture than you, a soldier and a veteran, can give her. Place her near me, and I will supply to her the mother whom she has lost.' "

" Did the Queen indeed say this ? " asked the astonished girl.

" She did, my child ; and how think you that I replied ? "

" With eager thanks, my father ; did you not ? I should myself have done so ; for it must be so sweet to feel a mother's love ! "

" Clara ! " said Zách sorrowfully ; " you shall hear how I answered ;—and would to heaven that my answer had availed ! "

" Madam ; " I said, as I bent my knee before her ; " I beseech you not to deprive me of my last hold on happiness. Deeply do I thank your Highness for the honour that you would do my simple Clara, but she is all unfit for a courtly circle. The child of a widowed father, she knows nothing of life save

what she has learnt from the love of those around her. My fair Zeba was taken from me by death; my boy is absent on his duty; and I have but her to make the joy of my gray hairs. I do then entreat you, Madam, leave her to be still the light of my solitude."

"And what said Elizabeth?" asked the maiden anxiously.

"She became cold and haughty, and told me that she would no longer delay my dutiful attendance on the King."

"Are there not many of the daughters of our nobles in the suite of the Queen?" once more inquired Clara.

"Many; nor can it be denied that she is a kind mistress;" replied Zách; "and that her careful nurture has in every instance added gracefulness to beauty; and yet—"

"Yet what, dear father?"

The old man was silent for a moment. Could he sully the young purity of his child's heart by hinting to her a knowledge of the dangers to which she would be exposed at the court of Charles Robert? He felt that he could not; and he therefore ter-

minated the pause by folding her to his bosom, and murmuring in her ear : “ And yet I cannot bear to part from you, my child.”

In an instant the eager light left the eye of the maiden ; and she fondly returned his embrace, as she whispered : “ True, true ; I had forgotten for a moment that the project of Elizabeth would have involved our parting ;—and we cannot, will not part, dear father.”

For a few weeks the Queen forbore all recurrence to the subject of the young beauty ; but her haughty spirit could ill brook that any subject, whatever might be his rank, should reject a favour at her hands ; and after a time she resolved that, be the motive of Zách for refusing to entrust his daughter to her guardianship what it might, she would not be thwarted in her purpose. She accordingly accustomed the old Magnate to talk to her of Clara ; of her innocence, her artlessness, and her beauty ; and as he became excited by the subject, he gradually threw off the reserve which he had previously maintained, and painted so glowingly the personal and moral perfections of the maiden, that the Queen, finding that the few who had been admitted to the

fortress of Zách corroborated the praises of the fond father, became really anxious in her turn to look on the fair being whom each described as something scarcely mortal in its loveliness ; and thus impelled, she at length demanded of the proud parent how he would hereafter be able to excuse himself for refusing to so beautiful a child the opportunity of that mental and social culture which only a court could give.

“ Bethink you, Baron ;” she said impressively : “ Your only daughter, pure and fair as you describe her, will have the right to mate herself with the highest and the noblest in the land ; but these are not the days of knight-errantry ; and so long as it shall please you to play the dragon of an enchanted castle, no suitor will be likely to disturb the solitude of your imprisoned beauty. Supposing, however, that this truth should not touch you, but that you should still hug yourself in your parental selfishness, and tell us that you would rather keep the maiden near you to be the solace of your old age ; how can you repay to her, when her vigil of affection shall have terminated beside your grave, for the life of soulless, mindless, and unloved monotony which she must

thenceforth lead? I speak to you as one who honours you, and would fain serve your child; and I talk to you on this subject, moreover, for the last time."

"Madam;" replied Zách, as on bent knee he raised the hand which Elizabeth kindly extended towards him, to his quivering lips; "I am rebuked; for I fear that too much of the leaven of self-love has indeed entered into my opposition to your gracious will. You have promised to be a mother to my child—my pure and loving child—and I hail the pledge with joyful gratitude, for she will indeed require a mother's care when——"

The old man paused. Anxious affection had hurried him to the verge of a precipice which might have been his ruin; and he hesitated on the brink, unable either to advance or to recede.

A dark shadow settled upon the haughty brow of Elizabeth, as she exclaimed impetuously; "While Clara Zách is under the care of the Queen of Hungary, you can scarcely fear that scathe should come to her."

"That I do not so, Madam;" replied the old Magnate, at once relieved from his self-created

difficulty by the hasty pride of Elizabeth; “is sufficiently demonstrated by the perfect trust with which I confide my innocent and loving child to the protection of your Highness. There can be no pollution in the atmosphere breathed by the consort of Charles Robert.”

“I thank you for your trust, my Lord of Zách;” said the Queen, at once conciliated by the unaffected earnestness of the Magnate; “Nor am I blind to the fact that there are about every court some few base spirits whom it is well to shun. But because we see the insects feast upon the fruit which has become rotten from over-ripeness, we are not therefore to shun that which is wholesome in its maturity.”

“Once more I am rebuked, Madam;” murmured Zách: “but your Highness will forgive me if I am over anxious for the happiness and honour of my poor orphan.”

“Call her so no longer;” said Elizabeth, with one of those smiles which from a sovereign to a subject are like sunshine to the expanding blossoms; “Henceforward she shall be my care. And now, hasten homeward to your sweet Clara, and tell her

that she is bidden to Viségrád at once by a mother and a queen."

She was obeyed ; and it would be difficult to define the precise feeling with which the veteran Baron was possessed, as the sturdy rowers impelled his little bark across the impetuous current of the river. The reproachful indignation of Elizabeth had done much to quiet his worst fears ; and as he remembered the grace and elegance of the high-born maidens by whom she was surrounded, his heart swelled with pride at the conviction that in loveliness his own fair Clara far outvied them all ; while the conviction grew upon him that he had indeed no right to deprive her of the privileges which the friendship of her Queen tendered to her acceptance.

Still the pang of parting would be most bitter ; for although he should be near her, and could look upon her frequently, their intercourse would, necessarily, no longer be what it had been : he must submit his affection to the thousand etiquettes and trammels of a court life ; and she would have other ties and other interests than those amid which she had grown up from childhood. It was a sad and a depressing thought ; and it sufficed to banish

from the reflections of the fond father all more dark forebodings. No dishonour had ever yet come near any one of the fair creatures by whom Elizabeth so loved to surround herself; and it was scarcely to be expected that he should continue to apprehend that such might be the fate of her, than whom the angels whom she so much resembled, could not be purer.

“Clara!” he said, as she welcomed him on his return from the fortress-palace; “Elizabeth has again asked you of me; and I have consented that for your own sweet sake, I will confide you to her care. Mine is a widowed and a dreary home; and pomp and pageant will soon replace for you the sadness and the solitude amid which you have so long lived. Yet do I not fear but that sometimes, Clara, you will dwell with affection, and perhaps with regret, upon the fond father and the fortress-home which have hitherto made your world.”

“I desire none wider or dearer;” murmured the maiden amid her tears.

“Bless you, my child, for the assurance!” said Zách: “but we have no alternative. There were reasons, Clara, anxious ones, which made me desire

for you a humbler and perchance a safer fate ; but we cannot contend with destiny ; and Elizabeth has pledged herself to be a parent to my motherless child."

For a few moments the father and daughter wept in each other's arms, but their tears were not all bitter. Despite their affection and their grief bright visions floated across the minds of both ; and ere long they became sufficiently calm to arrange their mutual plans, and to speculate upon the future : nor could the veteran, as he sat with the hand of the fair girl clasped in his own, and his eyes fixed upon her beautiful and expressive face, refrain at times from dreaming dreams of ambition at which his more sober reason afterwards made him smile ; while Clara herself, the boundary of whose wanderings and associations had hitherto been the lordly river that laved the base of her hill-seated home, felt like one suddenly stricken by the wand of an enchanter, who was about to inhabit a new world where all was bright and wonderful.

At length the parent and the child were parted. Elizabeth received in her arms the beautiful girl

who was confided to her guardianship ; and when Zách returned to his deserted home he felt that the light had departed from it for ever !

Accustomed as she was to fair faces and graceful forms, the Queen was nevertheless betrayed into astonishment when she first looked upon the extreme loveliness of Clara. Her deep blue eyes were full of light and feeling ; her long auburn tresses, as they caught the sunbeams, fell far below her waist like a shower of golden threads ; and there was a pure and childlike simplicity about her beauty that assimilated well with her slight and elastic figure, her joyous laughter, and her bounding step. You would have thought to look on her that the characters of sin and shame might have been more fitly written upon the leaf of the field-lily.

No marvel that the daughter of Felician Zách won her way at once to the hearts of all by whom she was surrounded. No one sorted the worsteds for Elizabeth's tapestry work like the blue-eyed fairy whose graceful mirth made an atmosphere of joy around her ; while even her young companions forgot to be envious of the Queen's new

favourite, as they confessed the spell of her loving simplicity.

Clara had been but three short months an inmate of the fortress-palace, and had never wandered beyond the apartments of her royal mistress, when in honour of the advent of King John of Bohemia, King Stephen of Bosnia, and Casimir King of Poland, the Queen's brother, Charles Robert held a tournament at Viségrád, to which he invited all that was great and noble in the nation. The invitation was too welcome to be disregarded ; and soon it was discovered that the three hundred and fifty guest-chambers being occupied by the Monarchs in whose honour the joust was to be celebrated, the champions, whatever their degree, must encamp along the bank of the river at the base of the citadel.

This necessity, far from diminishing the enjoyment of the knights and nobles collected together by so regal a festivity, added another feature of attraction to the scene ; and from sunrise to sunset the delighted maidens of the Queen were stationed at the friendly casements, whence they could look down upon the snowy tents and the

gallant stir about them ; giving mutual information of the identity of each champion, as some one among them recognised the flutter of a familiar banner. But the most delighted of the whole beauteous band was the daughter of Felician ; she, who had never hitherto beheld any military pageant more shewy than the sallying forth of a party of her father's retainers, was never weary of watching the movements of the mass of glinting armour and waving plumes spread out beneath her ; or of listening to the blast of the trumpet, and the neighing of the impatient war-horse.

Among the most honoured of the guests was John of Hommonaï, the son of the Palatine, who had during a sharp conflict saved the life of Charles Robert by turning aside the weapon of the Servian General Milotin Urosz, when it was about to strike him down ; and had also during the revolt of the Germans in Transsylvania brought up the Cumanian brigades most gallantly to the assistance of the Voivode. To this brave youth, and his lordly father the Palatine, were assigned chambers in the palace, although their followers were compelled to form a portion of the encampment ; and

warm and heartfelt were the greetings which they received from the monarch on their arrival.

They had brought with them a gorgeous company of knights and nobles, whose jewelled armour and horse-gear, lofty bearing, and chivalric lineage, made them indeed worthy to exhibit feats of arms before a company of kings ; and when Charles Robert welcomed them to his court and to his presence, his spirit swelled within him, for he felt that Europe could not produce a more gallant assembly.

It was a proud conviction ; and as he wrung the hand of John of Hommonaï, and thanked him for the grace which he had done to the bidding of his Sovereign, he could not but confess to his own heart that even had the young noble come alone and unattended to the tourney, he would still have been its brightest ornament ; for amid all that lordly crowd there was not one whose bearing, be it lofty as it might, did not fade into insignificance beside the son of the Palatine.

Strong and stately as a young oak self-planted in a genial spot, open to the sunshine and the breeze of heaven ; bold as an eagle soaring fearlessly amid the driving storm-clouds ; yet beau-

tiful and gentle as the dawn, which each feels is about to be succeeded by a day of light and glory—such was John of Hommonaï. Above a costume richly studded with gems, he wore a panther-skin slung carelessly across his shoulders, and clasped upon his breast by a clasp of gold uniting the claws of the beast, curiously tipped with the same precious metal. His head was bare, for he had withdrawn his *kalpak* with its heron plume as he entered the presence of the monarch; and his long black hair fell in rich curls upon his shoulders. His large black eyes flashed with gratified delight as he received the welcome which he had so nobly earned; and when at length he retired to superintend the accommodation of his followers, every lip was loud in his praise.

The lists were formed: the banners of the different champions heaved lazily in the summer wind. The four monarchs had taken their places beneath a superb canopy of crimson velvet, deeply fringed with gold; and the wide casement of the Queen's principal apartment, which opened upon the arena, being flung back, discovered Elizabeth and her ladies all gorgeously attired,

with two pages kneeling upon a cushion at her feet, holding upon a salver of burnished silver the gifts which had been prepared by herself and her attendants for the victor of the day. These consisted of a bridle embroidered with coloured silks and gold, a banner of rich velvet fringed with seed pearl, and a pair of delicate gauntlets whereon were wrought the initials of the two sovereigns. The prize given by the monarch was a sword of Damascene steel, of which the hilt was encrusted with jewels ; but, costly as it was, each young knight as he glanced towards the galaxy of beauty amid which Elizabeth sat enthroned, rather coveted the fairy favours which had been wrought by such peerless fingers, than the magnificent weapon of Charles Robert.

More than one joust had terminated ; more than one knight of name and mark had been unhorsed, and carried from the lists ; and still the Count Martin Bérendi remained master of the field. He was a gallant warrior of middle age ; and to him the lance was but a feather-weight, and the chances of the tourney a pleasant pastime. Again the trumpets sounded ; and the heralds summoned John of Hommonaï to the lists. He needed

no second *appel*; ere the last note of the brazen instrument died away, he had already bounded through the barrier, and had flung his noble horse upon his haunches, as he made his low and graceful obeisance to the assembled sovereigns. In another instant the combatants were face to face, and ready for the conflict.

In personal strength, or rather in muscular power, Bérendi greatly exceeded his more youthful adversary; but he had already held his station in the lists against three comers, and was consequently a more equal match for John of Hommonaï than he might possibly have been at the commencement of the tourney; although there were many present who scrupled not to declare, that the knightly skill of the Palatine's son would have rendered him under every circumstance a fitting antagonist for Martin Bérendi.

Be that as it may, however, it is certain that for a considerable time they both comported themselves with such judgment and gallantry, that not even a guess could be hazarded on the probable result of the combat; the earth seemed to tremble beneath them; and their weapons glanced like meteors in the

light. The friends and partisans of each watched most anxiously every turn of the combat; and it was amid loud and enthusiastic acclamations that John of Hommonaï was at length declared the victor; when he ultimately succeeded in unhorsing his gallant adversary.

The gorgeous sabre was belted round him by the hands of Charles Robert himself; and then the hero of the day was marshalled to the apartment of the Queen, and received from the smiling Elizabeth the velvet banner. He was still kneeling, when a fair girl near the Queen placed in his clasp the ornamented gauntlets; and he was then about to rise in order to retire, when Elizabeth said gaily: “One moment more, Sir Knight—You are surely more brave than courteous, that you weary so soon of our poor company! Come forward, Clara; and present to Lord John of Hommonaï our last and most elaborate gift.”

With a cheek flushing and fading alternately, like the leaf of a hedge rose when the breeze passes over it, approached the gentle girl; so graceful in her timidity, that the young soldier felt his own hand tremble in unison with hers, as she obeyed the bid-

ding of her royal mistress. For a moment their eyes met ; and then those of Clara fell beneath the impasioned gaze of the Knight ; and full of a trouble for which she could not account, and anxious only to escape the observation of the circle, forgetful alike of etiquette and of the duty which should have detained her near the Queen until she should be formally dismissed, the innocent and bashful girl turned suddenly away, and fled into an inner chamber.

The festival continued for three days ; and at every banquet Elizabeth appeared in regal state, and took her place between her husband and her brother, with her ladies ranged behind her, in their costume of ceremony. But the son of the Palatine, amid that splendid group, saw only Clara ; and as his spirit drank in her beauty, he sighed to think that she might perchance be already promised to another.

Magnificent was the spectacle presented by the grand and spacious banqueting-hall, as the attendants of the sovereigns looked down from their station upon the brilliant scene. Velvet draperies and golden cornices gave richness to the walls of the vast apartment ; the marble pavement was over-

laid with tapestry work; the tables were piled with vessels of gold and silver; and at the board sat all that was noble and chivalric in four neighbouring nations. Jewels flashed, and feathers flew; armour of burnished steel cast back the torchlight, and music poured forth its martial and inspiring strains; but the daughter of Felician Zách saw only, heard only, the gallant John of Hommonaï, as she marvelled whether earth held another so brave and so beautiful!

Not less attracted by the grace and gallantry of the noble Transylvanian, was Casimir of Poland; and as Charles Robert presented all the most distinguished of his guests, according to their several degrees, to the sovereigns, the Polish monarch displayed extraordinary graciousness towards Hommonaï; but courteously and becomingly as his advances were acknowledged, they were unwelcome to the young soldier, who, with the quick jealousy of awakened affection, had remarked the impression which had been made upon the Queen's brother by the extraordinary beauty of Clara; and conscious that the man upon whom he already looked as a rival, possessed advantages over himself, not only by his rank, but by his relationship to Elizabeth, which

must ensure to him that free access to her apartments necessarily denied to all others, he derived no satisfaction from a marked preference, which could not, under other circumstances, have failed to flatter alike his pride and his self-love.

Scarcely twenty years of age, eminently handsome, and naturally of a gay and joyous temperament, Casimir found much to interest him at the court of Viségrád. The chivalric bearing of the noble Magyars won his admiration, even while it failed to excite his emulation; and the luxurious habits of the Italian courtiers flattered his tastes and pampered appetites, already too prone to error and excess. In the eyes of Elizabeth, however, her noble-looking and high-hearted young brother was faultless. His wild and reckless spirit delighted her; and the public festivals began to appear wearisome in her eyes, because they withdrew him so constantly from her side. The fair girls about her were loud in their praises of the boy-king; and as it was a subject of which their mistress never tired, an hour rarely passed in which Casimir of Poland was not the theme of comment and discourse.

One voice only was mute in the eager chorus,

and that one was the voice of Clara ; but amid the volubility of the many, her silence passed unobserved. How could Clara expatiate on the graces and qualities of Casimir ? She who scarcely remembered his existence ; and before whose mental vision one image only floated ?

At the termination of the festivities, the Kings of Bosnia and Bohemia left Viségrád with their respective suites ; but the King of Poland, the Palatine and his son, as well as Lord Thomas, the Voïvode of Transylvania, remained behind, in order to join in a great hunt which Charles Robert had commanded to take place in the mountain-forests above the fortress of Zách. The old noble availed himself of this opportunity to invite Elizabeth and her ladies to abide with him during the continuance of the chase, in order that they might in some degree partake of its enjoyment ; and it was only when John of Hommonäi ascertained that the Queen, delighted at the novelty of the arrangement, had most graciously accepted the invitation of the Baron, that he began to look forward with pleasure to the prospect of a sport to which from his boyhood he had been enthusiastically attached.

With the first dawn, the whole of the royal party traversed the Danube in their gilded barges ; and were received on the opposite bank of the river by the gallant troop of archers and huntsmen who had passed over on the previous day. On the shore stood also the proud and delighted Felician, his *kalpag* in his hand, and his gray hairs scattered by the breeze, ready to welcome his royal guest and her young troop of beauties. As he folded his daughter to his heart, he murmured fondly, “Once more you will be under your father’s roof, my own sweet Clara—my darling child !”

For a time Elizabeth and her ladies found sufficient amusement in wandering over the old fortress, and admiring the beautiful prospect that it commanded. At their feet lay the village of Maros, basking in the sunshine, and mirrored in the giant river ; while towering on the opposite shore in all the pride of its gorgeous regality, rose the fortress-palace, with its lofty keep, its strong battlements, and its watchful sentinels. As time went by, however, a new interest was awakened by the cheerful blast of the hunter’s horn, as it came to them upon the wind, and was answered by the echoes of the

valley ; while occasionally a herd of deer, driven from their retreat by the arrows of the archers, would bound away under the very walls of the fortress, in search of safety in some more distant retreat.

The ardour of the chase led the royal party so deep into the mountains, that Charles Robert at length perceiving by the long shadows which lay along the earth, that a return to Viségrád would be impracticable until the morrow, suggested to Casimir a visit to the fortress of Zách.

“The Baron is brave and loyal ;” he said ; “and as he must already have made courtly preparations for your sister, we shall do well to join her there. We carry our meal with us, after having nobly earned it ; and the old fortress is wide enough to contain twice our number.”

Proud was the satisfaction with which the veteran Magnate received the two Sovereigns and the Voívode ; and although a less pleasant feeling mingled with his welcome of the Palatine, his words were courteous, and his manner bland. It was in truth a trying position for both ; for during the rule of the Count of Trenschin, Zách had often

opposed Hommonaï in the field, and when his party triumphed, assisted in despoiling their lands and harassing their peasantry. Since that period, although they had never met as enemies, they had looked coldly upon each other ; and a feeling of dislike had been cherished between them, which rendered obligation on the one part, and hospitality on the other, equally difficult to bear and to enact.

Situated as they were, however, they had no alternative save to treat the matter as lightly as circumstances would permit ; but each played the hypocrite so imperfectly that the coldness of their communion suddenly recalled to the memory of Charles Robert their ancient hostility. The evening repast was at its height, and the gentle Clara, as hostess of the castle, had just filled the goblet of the King, when turning towards the Transylvanian Prince he said earnestly :

“ My Lord of Hommonaï, ere I found myself safely seated on the throne of the Magyars, I had to encounter sharp strife and dangerous enemies ; but when once I felt the sacred crown upon my brow, I forgot my feuds, and forgave my foes. To-night I see two old adversaries at the board beside

me—need I say how gladly I should look upon them as friends?"

For a moment there was sudden and deep silence—so deep that the son of the Palatine could hear the beating of his own heart; but in the next, both the Magnates rose, and, approaching each other, extended the hand of amity amid the loud acclamations of the whole circle. The only voice that remained silent was that of John of Hommonaï; for he felt as though in that reconciliation between his own parent and the father of Clara was involved his future destiny; and the joy of his spirit was so intense that he could not give utterance to a syllable.

As in pursuance of the duties of hospitality in those days, the gentle girl moved among the most distinguished of the guests, supplying their wants, and anticipating their wishes; the eyes of the enamoured young man followed her timid and graceful movements, with a passionate admiration that dyed the cheeks of Clara with a crimson blush; and once as she glided near him, he whispered, "Our fathers are reconciled; love will replace hate; and we may yet be happy."

The words were simple, but the tone in which they were uttered made its way at once to the heart of the timid girl ; and bounding from the side of the young soldier, she placed the golden vessel that she held in the hand of an attendant, and escaped from the hall.

Scarcely had the maiden disappeared, when the guests of Zách became loud in their praises of her beauty ; and the delighted father heard with ecstacy the flattering comments of royalty on the perfections of his child.

On the morrow the regal party quitted the fortress of the old Magnate, who presented to the King of Poland, on his departure, a superb scymetar with a jewelled hilt, which one of his ancestors had carried off from a Turkish Pasha whom he had worsted in the field ; and the glance of Elizabeth turned complacently on Clara, as she recognised the courtesy which had been shown to her favourite brother. But there was another gaze fastened on her fair brow that rendered the gentle girl unconscious of all other notice ; for she *felt* that the eyes of Hommonaï, which she dared not meet, followed her every movement.

The brief ride along the lip of the river, and the traverse of the stream itself, was as joyous as light hearts and buoyant spirits could ensure. More than once the two lovers, for such they had indeed become, found themselves side by side ; and upon each occasion the young Knight contrived to murmur a few words of tenderness in the ear of the blushing Clara ; but ere two hours had elapsed, the splendid train had arrived at Viségrád ; and the Queen at once retired to her apartments, attended by her ladies, while the two sovereigns and their distinguished guests passed on into the great hall of the palace.

Anxiously did John of Hommonaï await the moment when, dismissed by Charles Robert, the princes and nobles would be at liberty to withdraw for a time to their several chambers ; and no sooner did he see the Palatine pass into the gallery which had been appropriated to himself and his suite, than he hastily followed ; and after an instant's hesitation, exclaimed energetically :

“ The Saints be praised, my Lord, that you have become reconciled to the Baron Zách, for I love his daughter ; and now that your feud is at

an end, I will ask you to demand her for me in marriage."

"How, young man!" frowned the ambitious Palatine; "The daughter of Felician Zách! You are well advised to send me on such a mission. Have you forgotten who you are, and to whom you speak? Know that our reconciliation is but lip-deep on either side; and that I would rather see you stretched at my feet a corpse, than welcome such a daughter to my hall and hearth."

"Then will you do so;" said the young soldier respectfully but firmly; "for you will never see me wed another."

"Words! words!" exclaimed the Palatine impatiently; "A butterfly in the sunbeam—a ripple on the summer wave—the fancy will pass by, and you will thank me for saving you from an act of folly. Meanwhile, I will put you for the present beyond temptation; for to-morrow at dawn I shall set forth for my palatinate, whither you will be prepared to accompany me."

Having uttered these words in a tone of decision from which his son well knew that there was no appeal, the Palatine busied himself in removing his

helmet, as if to imply that the conference, brief as it had been, was ended ; and with a bent brow and throbbing heart, the disappointed lover withdrew to his own apartment.

But when, at the close of the banquet, the Lord of Hommonaï, after humbly acknowledging the condescension and hospitality of the monarch, requested leave for himself and his son to return on the morrow to his government, Charles Robert at once negatived the measure.

“ Nay, nay, my good Lord Palatine ; ” he said courteously ; “ Have you forgotten that my royal brother Casimir of Poland will need better entertainment than I of myself can offer ? Talk not of departure from Viségrád ; for neither will I part from you, nor our brave friend the Voïvode, nor your gallant son. Do not let me think that the cheer of this our fortress-palace hath grown stale already to such honoured guests ! ”

All opposition to the King’s will was, of course, impossible ; nor were two of the party disposed to offer any. The Voïvode, captivated by the luxury of Viségrád, the condescension of the Monarch, and the wit and gaiety of the Polish King, required no

inducement to prolong his stay; while John of Hommonaï had a still dearer link to bind him to the fortress-palace. The Palatine alone would have desired to leave it without further delay; but when he discovered that this would be displeasing to Charles Robert, he contented himself by manifesting increased coldness towards Felician Zách, and affecting altogether to overlook his beautiful child. To his son he did not vouchsafe a single comment. He would not even seem to believe that any opposition to his will could be contemplated by one dependant on his pleasure; and thus he affected to have altogether forgotten the circumstance of his predilection for the Baron's daughter.

The Palatine's determination produced, however, a most painful effect upon his son. Instead of mingling, as he had previously done, in every manly sport, he ceased to take interest in any. Even the volatile spirits of Casimir, so contagious to the rest of the courtly circle, only increased his melancholy; and it at length became so confirmed, that it attracted the attention of the Monarch; who, on one occasion, when he accidentally found himself alone with the Palatine, inquired with con-

siderable earnestness the cause of so singular a change.

“Why is your gallant son so gloomy, my Lord of Hommonaï?” he asked. “There was a time when he was ever foremost in feast and sport alike; and now he shuns all contact, and muses away his hours beneath the old elms, or wastes them in galloping, aimless and companionless, about the forest. It pains me to see him thus—he, the conquerer of Urosz the Servian—my own deliverer from danger, if not death.”

“Your Highness does the wayward boy too much honour;” said the Palatine, while the flush of anger rose and burnt into his brow. “Instead of devoting every thought to the pleasure of your Grace, your royal brother, and your guests, he has so far forgotten what was due alike to his King and to his father, as to form an attachment for the daughter of Felician Zách, my ancient enemy.”

“Hommonaï;” said the King somewhat coldly; “in my presence you forswore all former feud.”

“But I cannot, nevertheless, receive my foe as a brother, nor his child as a daughter;” was the

equally cold reply ; “ I have other and higher views for my son.”

“ What would you more ? ” asked Charles Robert hastily. “ Braver noble in Hungary there is none than Felician Zách ; nor can aught more beautiful than Clara be found in any land .”

“ I cannot wed my son to a pauper-bride.”

“ Now, by St. John of Nepomucene ! ” exclaimed the King ; “ none shall so treat of Elizabeth’s favourite. Look you, my Lord Palatine : the broad lands which I will bestow upon the Lady Clara shall render her a fitting bride even for your only son—while for Felician himself, no man shall mouthe his name lightly unless he can show full cause. But we will not make a quarrel of this matter, my brave Lord Hommonaï ; I love your son—I have good cause to do so ; and I will plead his cause coolly and patiently, in part payment of the debt. Of Clara I need say little ; you have seen her, and do not require any comment upon her loveliness and modesty. The Queen loves her as a daughter ; and my fair boys look on her as their good genius. Come, come, my gallant friend ; forget the past, and tell me that you will relent .”

"I cannot oppose my Sovereign!" said the Palatine, with reluctant acquiescence.

"Why, this indeed is well!" laughed Charles Robert, delighted by his success. "Why should an old hatred extinguish a new love? I will summon Zách upon the instant; and then Elizabeth shall be informed of the destiny of her fair favourite."

The Palatine, considering himself dismissed by this intimation, bowed and retired; and the King having dispatched a page to the archery ground where the nobles were assembled, to desire the immediate attendance of the Baron Zách, continued to pace up and down the lime-avenue in which his dialogue with Hommonáï had taken place, until the old Magnate appeared in obedience to the command. For a while the veteran was, however, as sturdy in refusal as his haughty rival; but he based his dissent upon other grounds.

"I deeply thank your Grace;" he said with proud humility; "for this new passage in your care for my fair child; but Clara cannot be the bride of John of Hommonáï."

"And wherefore?" demanded the King, losing patience.

"Simply because we have been at feud ; and that Thomas of Hommonai must not think that he owes my daughter to his rank and wealth."

"Would you rather see your child wretched than sacrifice your own false pride ?" asked Charles Robert : "I had nobler thoughts of you."

Much more passed ere the King succeeded in inducing the veteran to yield ; but at length he silenced all opposition ; and the delight of the lovers can only be appreciated by those who have undergone similar trials, when they learnt that they were indeed free to indulge the affection which had now become a portion of their existence.

The ceremony of betrothal was performed ; and the ostentatious generosity of the Palatine loaded the affianced bride with jewelled ornaments ; while Elizabeth and her ladies were soon busily engaged in divers pieces of delicate needlework, wrought with tinted silks and seed pearl. Charles Robert, true to his munificent promise, settled upon the fair and blushing Clara a noble tract of country adjoining the Transylvanian frontier ; but the most cherished gift was that of the young husband, who clasped about her snowy neck twelve rows of large

oriental pearls, such as a Sultana would have been proud to bind upon her brow. Clara loved them not however for their priceless value, but because the hand that was dearest to her on earth had placed them there.

All was gaiety and expectation throughout the fortress-palace. The approaching marriage and its attendant festivals were the one engrossing theme of conversation both in hall and bower-chamber; and the first break in the joyousness of the court circle was occasioned by the necessary and unavoidable departure of the Palatine and his son, for the seat of government from which they had been so long absent.

There were more bright eyes dim than those of Clara, as they watched from their lofty casements the departure of the princely guests; but none that wept so long and so secretly. And yet she had blissful memories to fall back upon, and happy hopes to gild the future; and smiles at times burst through her tears, even when she thought herself the most wretched. Comparative quiet settled over the palace: the royal family were left alone. The Queen's brother, and Charles Robert, attended by

Felician Zách, the Chamberlain Denis Szécsi, and other nobles of the household, diverted themselves with the chase ; and Elizabeth and her ladies found unceasing amusement in preparing the marriage gear of their fair favourite.

It chanced on a day when slight indisposition compelled the King to remain within the palace, that Casimir having exhausted every in-door avocation in which he could compel himself to feel an interest, and become weary of his own thoughts, as well as of his customary companions, strolled into the apartments of his sister, who had just passed into those of her husband ; and entered the hall in which the attendants of the Queen were seated in a circle, busied at their embroidery frames. For a time they were unconscious of his presence ; for, free from all restraint, they were jesting gaily at the expense of the blushing Clara, who sat crimson with confusion, striving to conceal the smiles that, despite all her efforts, repaid their cheerful sallies.

Never had she looked more beautiful ! One of her young companions had withdrawn the golden bodkins from her hair, which fell about her in rich

and shining masses, and was wreathing above her brow a garland of the white lotus; the passion-flower of the Indians. Careless of all save the sweet future which another was pourtraying, Clara lent herself gracefully to the harmless pastime; and as Casimir looked upon the slight and exquisitely moulded figure, and the beaming face before him, dark passions rose within his heart; and for the first time he congratulated himself that he was the occupant of a throne, and that many a beauty had been won from her faith by a less lure.

When he had gazed his fill, and become more and more convinced that he had never before beheld so beautiful a being as the daughter of Felician Zách, he retreated quietly from the threshold of the hall; and then, gaily carolling an air popular at the time in Hungary, in order to apprise the fair group of his approach, he once more appeared at the entrance of the apartment, and hastily traversing the floor, stood in the centre of the party.

"And where is my gentle sister?" he asked, like one suddenly conscious of her absence. "I thought to have found her here."

"The Queen is with his Highness, your Grace ;" replied one of the ladies respectfully.

"My Grace is then alone with the Graces :" laughed the Polish monarch ; "Black eyes and blue, you are all my kindred and subjects ; and were I not as merciful as I am strong, I would enforce such tribute as should convince you of my power."

"We are the subjects of another sovereign ;" said a light-hearted damsel with eyes like sloes in October, and lips like roses in the harvest month. "We owe your Highness respect, but not allegiance."

"Ha ! say you so, my dainty sophist ?" exclaimed Casimir : "Am I then to expect no obedience ? Am I to look for no submission ? Do not dare me to the proof, lest I write it on your rosy lips."

"Your Grace surely jests with us ;" said a haughty, tall, and swan-necked beauty, looking up almost with defiance from her embroidery frame. "We are the daughters of nobles, and the ladies of her Grace the Queen of Hungary."

"Can you be serious ?" said the light-headed and light-hearted King, affecting a gesture of comic surprise : "I never should have guessed so alarm-

ing a fact! You all look so unfitted for such a destiny! I must read my royal sister a lesson, and advise her to spare herself such unpleasant contact."

In follies such as these, his own wild gaiety provoking equally gay retorts from the spoiled beauties among whom he stood, industriously employed in demolishing or disarranging the costly silks of their embroidery, the idle young Monarch trifled away an hour; but although he had exerted every effort to induce Clara to bear her part in the conversation, she had not opened her lips since she rose to greet him on his entrance; nor had she even bestowed a smile upon his light and wayward sallies; for she had no sooner ceased to be the subject of discourse, and the object of attention, than she relapsed into the fond reverie from which the jestings of her companions had previously aroused her.

Exasperated at her indifference, a vow rose to the lips of Casimir which blended but ill with his parting smile, as with a graceful salutation he at length quitted the hall. The poison had touched the barb, and his hand was ready to launch the arrow. The more attentively he had considered Clara, the more he had become convinced that she

was worthy of every risk that he might incur to ensure her possession ; and with the selfish and unprincipled Casimir to will was to do. From that day forth, although he entered with willingness into every amusement suggested by Charles Robert, his thoughts were full of Clara, and his brain busy with dark plottings against her unsuspecting innocence. Thenceforward, he haunted the avenues of the Queen's apartments ; nor was it long ere in one of the galleries he encountered the fair girl alone. The opportunity was too precious to be lost ; and uncertain how soon they might be interrupted, he at once seized the amazed and affrighted Clara by the waist, and without regarding her pale cheek and shrinking terror, he poured forth volubly his passionate admiration, and conjured her to return his love. Pride and indignation lent strength to the outraged girl ; and bursting from his hold with an expression of scornful detestation, she fled like a lapwing along the gallery, and escaped to the refuge of her own chamber.

Only a few days had elapsed, when, unable longer to forego a sight of his affianced wife, John of Hommonaï arrived unheralded at Viségrád.

Even from a distance Clara saw and recognised her lover; and with a cry of joy she started from her tapestry-frame, and rushed forward to meet him; but she had scarcely reached the ante-room when she suddenly paused, and as the blood receded from her cheek and lip, her heart throbbed violently, and the thought of Casimir rose like a dark spirit between her and her happiness.

The fearful secret that had pressed upon her like an incubus had never passed her lips; to the Queen she dared not divulge it; to her father she would not, for how could she look upon his gray hairs, and shape a tale so hateful into words? From the comments of her companions she already shrank with a pure and maidenly timidity, which chilled her into silence upon a theme that must provoke others far more repugnant; and thus she had borne her grief alone and in bitterness; and now—now—she could pour forth her sorrow, and find escape in the love of him who was soon to be her husband.

But she had scarcely looked upon her approaching lover, when another conviction smote upon her heart. She must still guard her loathsome secret;

for there was a fire in the eye of Hommonai that not even the tenderness of love could quench ; and with the quick instinct of true affection, all innocent and simple as she was, she felt that this was an insult to be revenged, and not a wrong to be borne ; and she had not been pressed to the bosom of her affianced lover longer than he had time to murmur out her name, ere she had made her resolve ; but the effort cost her a struggle, and her smile of welcome was quenched in a shower of bright but bitter tears.

“ Do you weep, Clara ? ” asked Hommonai reproachfully : “ Have I disturbed a pleasant solitude ? ”

The fair girl only replied by a look ; but that look was worth a world of words.

“ Will you not ask me my errand ? ” resumed the young Noble, with an arch and happy smile.

“ I do not desire to know anything ; ” was the low but earnest reply : “ You are here, and I am happy ! ”

Hommonai pressed his lips to the fair brow that rested on his bosom : “ I do but look on you, sweet love, once more to leave you. I quit Viségrád at

sunset; but I am here, Clara, to urge the hastening of our nuptials. I am wretched when parted from you. A thousand dark and withering fears grow upon my spirit. You, love, I never doubt; but when I remember your youth, your beauty, and your innocence, and call up in array before me the licentious habits of this dissolute and reckless court —above all, when I think of the wild, libertine King of Poland——”

“Oh! speak not of him;” almost shrieked the maiden, as she involuntarily buried her face yet closer in the panther skin which hung across the breast of her lover; “Speak not of him—talk only of yourself—of your return——”

“What means this burst of passion, Clara?” asked the young man eagerly, as he raised her pale cheek from its resting-place, and looked earnestly into her eyes: “What of Casimir of Poland?”

“Oh, nothing, nothing;” gasped the maiden: “Let us not talk of him when we have such brief time for converse; tell me rather, dearest and best, wherefore you are here.”

“Clara;” said Hommonaï almost severely; “this

emotion is suspicious. What are you striving to conceal from me?"

"At least it is not my love;" said Clara, assuming a tender playfulness, as she once more escaped from his piercing glance, by averting her blushing face; "or I should not be here to meet you, but rather have waited to be sought."

"It is true, sweet one;" replied Hommonai, delighted at the avowal. "And now tell me how you have sped since we parted. Have you once sighed for me, Clara?"

"Sighed for you!" echoed the maiden, with a slight shudder: "Aye, till my heart dropped blood. You have been the very hope of my dreams, and my every thought of you by day has been a prayer. But tell me now what blessed chance has sped you here?"

"Have I not told you, dearest, that it was to hasten our nuptials?"

"True, true, I had forgotten;" murmured the maiden, as the blood once more fled from her cheek: "and you depart at sunset. Could you not linger here until we go together?"

"Think you that if this were indeed possible, I

should leave you thus, after the meeting of a moment? Alas, Clara, do you not yet know me better?"

" It was an idle and a foolish question; I pray you pardon me."

" Fye on you, pretty one! Could I quarrel with such a wish, I were unworthy of it. But I have not yet seen the King, Clara; and I must not forget in your bright eyes either my Sovereign or my duty."

Little more passed between them; for the moments of Hommonaï were numbered; and when he had taken a fond farewell of his weeping mistress, he hastened to the presence of Charles Robert, where, on bent knee, he presented a letter from the Palatine, praying that the nuptials might take place ere the new moon, in order that his son might be prepared to accompany him in his expedition against Bazarád of Wallachia.

" We will see to this, young sir :" said the King, as he refolded the letter, and looked kindly upon his petitioner: " You are a bold man thus to grasp a bride with one hand, and a weapon with the other; but we will strive to help you in this

matter. Return to your father with all speed, for this is not a moment in which he can spare you from his side, and you shall have our answer by a swift messenger when we have laid your cause before the Queen. My brother of Poland, too, will sue for you should the fair Clara reject your supplication; he is young, and will understand your impatience better perchance than her Grace or I; for Elizabeth, Queen though she be, is doubtless woman enough to hold that her favourite cannot be duly and honourably wedded without store of satins and spangles; while I, who understand love only as a day-dream, in which one sun-ray chases another, shall scarcely know how to phrase a suit of downright and persevering passion. You Magyars manage these things differently from we of Italy."

And Charles Robert laughed the light and ribald laugh of a libertine as he glanced at Casimir of Poland who stood near him, and who answered the appeal by another even less seemly. The blood of Hommonaï boiled with indignation; but he had no alternative, save to act upon the dismissal of the King, and to take his leave, which he did with a vow upon his lips, that from the moment when he

should call Clara his wife, he would preserve her from the contagious atmosphere of the Italian court as carefully as from a pestilence.

Poor Hommonaï!—But I must not anticipate.

The westering sun had pillow'd its crown of gold upon the mountain crests, and then withdrew like a hero wearied with his own glory, into the recesses of the mighty sea ; and already was John of Hommonaï upon his homeward track. Quick throbbed his pulse ; and he urged his noble horse to greater speed, as though he could by rapidity of motion still the tempest which was raging at his heart. He was for the moment forgetful that every bound of the generous animal which bore him only increased the distance between him and his pure young love !

Twilight succeeded—the cool, gray, dreamy twilight—that link between the coming night and the spent day, which seems to be the breathing-hour of nature—that mystic moment when the Creator draws a veil over the world which softens without concealing its beauties—the soft and serene gloaming, when birds twitter out their last notes of melody ere they fold their heads beneath their wings, and people the boughs with silent and almost

invisible life—and the earth, like a steaming chalice, pours forth its dewy treasure upon leaves and flowers, and sprinkles the long grass and the wild herbs with liquid diamonds.

Darker and darker fell the shadows—and it was night—and then uprose the moon; and in the illuminated landscape every tower and battlement, and tree and mountain, was drawn sharp, and hard, and black, as though it had been wrought in ebony upon the surface of the earth. Nothing was heard save the whispering of the wind among the branches, the solitary song of the night-bird, and the monotonous and gentle plashing of the waters, as they fell from the fountain-jets into their capacious basins.

It was the very hour for gentle memories. All was so calm, so holy, and so pure. No sound or sight of the world's littleness intruded on the quiet of the time; and as Clara, muffled in a sable cloak, stole forth into the shadows of the palace garden to think upon her lover, it was not wonderful that amid the stillness and the beauty of the night she forgot all darker thoughts, and dwelt only on the image of him to whose heart she had been clasped so lately. She could muse on him so freely beneath

the blue canopy of the star-set sky, where no mocking eyes were on her ; she could almost fancy that she still felt his breath upon her cheek, as the soft breeze swept by, and stirred the golden ringlets of her hair ; she could almost image his lofty and graceful form in the shadows of —

But, hark ! What piercing shriek makes the night-wind shiver as it wanders on ? What frenzied cry stills the low warble of the bird of song, and bids the plashing waters fall back unheard into their marble shells ? It is the heart-scream of a woman, and it has shaped itself into a single word—it calls to one who cannot hear or save !

“ Hommonaï ! Hommonaï !” pealed out the shrill and ringing cry. It was the voice of Clara Zách—of the only daughter of a brave house—of the favourite of a Queen—and the glory of a court—“ Hommonaï ! Hommonaï !” again came the wild yell almost fiercely upon the wind ; and suddenly a female figure started forward into the light from beneath the deep arch of the fortress, and hurried downward towards the river. There it paused ; but the pause was transient ; for in the next instant it sprang fearlessly into a boat that was moored

beneath the rock, and was borne rapidly onward by the mad current of the dancing waves.

It was Clara ; and she had done with fear. Her hair, released from the fillet which should have bound it, streamed in the wind of midnight ; her mantle had fallen off, and her light dress was folded tightly round her like the draping of an antique statue, by the steady breeze that swept along the surface of the Danube ; her eyes were dilated and tearless ; and from between her fast-clenched teeth the blood gathered in heavy gouts upon her parched and parted lips, and fell in sanguine drops upon her white dress and her still whiter bosom. At intervals, as with almost superhuman strength she battled with the current, and urged her little bark along, the same wild cry mingled with the swift wind and the jarring waters, and at length she touched the shore, and bounded from the boat only a few paces below the stronghold of her father.

Breasting the height on which the fortress stood, without the hesitation of a moment, on rushed the maddened girl, until, almost spent with toil, she stood panting and breathless before the gate of her once happy home. “Open ! ye who watch to shield

your lord from treachery ;” she yelled forth, as the astonished warder, deeming that he beheld a spectre, was about to fly from his post : “Open ! It is the daughter of Felician Zách who stands beside the gate at midnight, and bids ye fling it back !”

As he recognised her voice, the terrified official obeyed her bidding in silence ; and onward, without another word, but with a wild laugh and the speed of lightning, rushed the dishonoured child of the chieftain to the bedside of her sleeping father.

“ Awake, Felician Zách !” shouted the young and frenzied girl, as she flung herself upon him, and grasped his arm with a strength which might have become a warrior ; her large eyes gleaming with the light that is born of madness : “ Awake ! Why do you lie sleeping here when there is work to do ? Has your harness rusted in the hall, or your weapon in its sheath ? This is no time for slumber—You have no longer a daughter ! Away to Viségrád ; it was there that she was lost to you ; and I am come to tell the tale. On, Felician Zách, and strike freely—A stately head may be laid low, even though a crown encircles it —”

Like a roused lion, goaded in his lair, sprang the

proud Magyar to his feet. He asked no question of his maddened child ; nor, when he saw her sink down senseless at his side, did he make one effort to raise her up. He felt at once that she had told him true, and that he had indeed no longer a daughter.

He shed no tear—he uttered no lamentation ; the eye that weeps, and the voice that reviles, know not an anguish like his. He gnawed his lips until the blood followed the pressure of his teeth ; he drew his breath hard, like one who recks not how soon it may abandon him ; and at intervals he glanced at the pale and blighted maiden who lay still and lifeless at his feet, and then raised his dark brow to heaven, as though he asked from thence the curse he could not utter !

With such violence did the ill-fated father fling back the heavy oaken door of the armoury, that it rebounded as he passed the threshold ; and the vibration which it caused detached from its fastenings a Damascus blade, which, like the one that he had presented to the King of Poland, had been a Turkish spoil.

“ I accept the omen ; ” said the veteran gloomily,

as the echoes of the ringing steel died away amid the carving of the groined and lofty roof ; “any weapon will suffice for vengeance.” And lifting the scymetar from the floor, he quitted the armoury.

But for that vengeance he had still to wait, for day had not yet dawned, and all nature was buried in one dim and dusky veil ; save where the moon, already paling beneath the influence of the coming day, gave evidence that her reign was almost over ; and cast a ghostly gleam, like the memory of a crushed hope, over the spots on which her faint light fell.

Compelled to await the dawning, Felician Zách, weapon in hand, returned to take one last long look into the chamber where he had left his child. She lay there still : cold and motionless, like some fair statue that had been hurled from its proud pedestal—beautiful but dishonoured. Where were now her worshippers ? A profane hand had rent the veil of the temple, and the holiness of the shrine was desecrated for ever.

The old man bent down, and looked upon her—silently at first, and solemnly, like one who looks upon the dead, still doubting the fact of his bereave-

ment: but ere long, a wild laugh escaped from between his parted lips; loud, and long, and bitter as the mirthless laughter of fiends, which born of agony borrows its voice from discord. It was a sad sight to see him gazing on the corse-like girl with fixed and glassy eyes, his silver hair swept back from his throbbing temples, and his hand armed with the instrument of vengeance.

It is in such hours as these that man lives through a life of agony, and feels that the warm stream which courses through his veins has turned to gall and fire, blistering and scorching up the frame it should have sustained and strengthened; and carrying death upon its tide as surely as the poisoned arrow plants it within the wound.

How he had loved his fair and motherless child! How he had hung upon her infant smile: gloried in the promise of her girlhood; and exulted in the beauty of her youth—And what was she now? A bruised and blighted thing, to which earth could offer nothing welcome save a grave. Zách felt and knew this as he gazed upon her, but he shed no tear. What had he to do with tears? His was a sterner duty than that of grief; and as at length the

pale and mournful dawn slowly made its way through the party-coloured casement, he once more started to his feet, and arousing one of the still sleeping grooms, bade him instantly bring out his horse, without comment or delay.

To and fro, like an unquiet spirit, strode the agonized father, as he awaited in the court-yard the fulfilment of his orders; and long ere the retainers were astir he was already galloping madly down the steep rock upon which stood his hitherto happy home, and nearing the river. Once arrived at the edge of the little creek where the boat lay moored which afforded communication with Viségrád, he sprang from the saddle, and turning his noble horse loose to wander where it listed, he was instantly on board, and guiding with his nervous arm the progress of the bounding skiff.

At the palace, meanwhile, the risen sun had summoned from their beds all the tenants of the gorgeous pile; for in the olden time even the greatest and the proudest commenced their day ere the dew was absorbed from the uplands; and thus it was without much surprise that Elizabeth, ere the morning meal had been announced, received

intelligence from one of her ladies that her royal brother Casimir desired to be admitted for a brief period, to her private apartment.

With a hasty command for his admission, the Queen dismissed her attendants, although not without some foreboding of evil; for she was too well aware of the unprincipled and libertine character of Casimir to doubt that he sought her upon this occasion, as he had already done on many others, to ask her assistance in his extrication from some difficulty induced by his own want of self-government; and, despite the haughty fearlessness of her nature, her heart beat quick as she awaited him, and a thousand vague and nameless fears swept across her spirit. Her resolve was, however, instantaneous. Be the difficulty what it might, either in origin or extent, everything must be sacrificed to the peace and pleasure of her royal kinsman; for to Elizabeth earth seemed to contain no object so dear as Casimir, his extreme personal attraction and seductive manners appearing to her weak and doting affection a sufficient apology for every dereliction from rectitude. But notwithstanding this unjust and dangerous creed, the

Queen was wholly unprepared for such a tale as that which the reprobate boy-King now came to tell!

"No, no——" she exclaimed passionately, as Casimir faltered out the confession of his crime; "You are idly testing the strength of my affection—You cannot have done this—Clara! the pride and ornament of Viségrád—the favourite of Charles Robert—the adopted child of your sister!—No, no, it is but a sorry jest, Casimir; for even you dared not to have done this."

"Do I look as though I jested?" was the reply; "Am I not rather like one with whom the madness is scarcely yet overpast? Doubt is idle—I come to you only for a remedy."

"Alas, if this indeed be true, there is none——" said Elizabeth, whose pale cheek and trembling lip attested the violence of her emotion; "Rash boy! what have you done? Have you yet to learn the uncompromising nature of these fiery Magyars, to whom their honour is far dearer than their life? Were there not stranger-maidens at the court, who would have held your homage cheap, at whatever price? You must not linger at Viségrád another day, for I, Queen though I be, am powerless to

screen you here, nor do you deserve that I should brave the anger of the King, when you have not hesitated to bring disgrace and dishonour to the very threshold of my own apartment."

"You abandon me, then ;" said the Polish King haughtily ; "and wherefore ? Because for the first time my excesses chance to be irksome and dangerous to yourself. What have I now done more than you have already excused a score of times ? Listen to me, Elizabeth. *You* are the guilty party in this transaction. You have long known my nature, and smiled upon my vices. Why did you drag that innocent and happy girl from the safeguard of her father's roof ; and transplant her to your own vain and dissolute court ? Was it not because your eye loved to rest upon so fair an object, and that you could not consent to forego the sweet indulgence ? It was strange you should never guess that others might be equally susceptible of her attractions ; and that the atmosphere of Viségrád was ill suited to her pure nature !"

"I promised to look upon her as a child, and little deemed that any one would dare——"

"It was a holy promise !" laughed Casimir in

bitter mockery ; “and how was it performed ? Was it to the affection and watchfulness of a mother that I owed the facilities with which I have been favoured ; and which, had she not been as cold as she was beautiful, would long ere this have rendered her a willing prize instead of a struggling victim ? If it indeed be so, I have strangely mistaken terms——”

“These taunts cannot avail us ;” said Elizabeth, smitten to the soul by the reproachful words of her brother ; “ You must leave Viségrád. Seek, therefore, for some specious reason which may satisfy Charles Robert ; and depart at once, ere your share in this unhappy matter is revealed. The morning meal is now prepared ; let it be the last that we take together until all is remedied, or rather forgotten ”

The advice was too judicious to be neglected ; and, accordingly, on leaving the apartments of the Queen, Casimir intimated to his surprised and disconcerted nobles, who were little anxious to exchange the luxurious splendour of Viségrád for the comparatively monotonous Court of Poland, that he should depart at day-break on the morrow ; and

having so done, and commanded the immediate attention of his attendants to such arrangements as might tend to facilitate his purpose, he proceeded to the hall in which the royal party were to break their fast.

Great was the surprise of Charles Robert, and the well-acted astonishment of the Queen, when, having taken his seat at the board, Casimir declared his intention of leaving Viségrád on the following day. A thousand objections were started by the King, but they were all overruled by the declaration of his guest that public duty claimed his presence in his own capital. The subject was still under discussion when an unwonted noise was heard on the very threshold of the apartment; and, ere a question could be answered, the Baron Zách entered hastily, and without greeting, his naked weapon in his hand, and his eyes glaring like those of a hunted tiger. In an instant his gaze fastened on the King of Poland, and he made a spring towards him, which the conscious libertine escaped by retreating hastily through a lateral door near which he had been seated.

Baffled, but not subdued, the infuriated Magnate

made a second rush, and would have pursued the seducer of his child to the innermost recesses of the palace, but the Queen, uncertain that her brother would escape through the gallery in time to avoid the pursuit of the avenger, flung herself across his path; and ere Zách could recover himself, his weapon struck, and severed the hand of Elizabeth. In an instant the Count Kénécsics, the son of the brave Gyula, seized the young princes Andrew and Louis by the hand, and hurried them from the hall; while the Baron John Csellej, Chamberlain to the Queen, who chanced to be standing immediately in the rear of Zách, smote him violently from behind, and he fell forward upon the pavement, bathed in his own blood.

He was instantly seized and bound by the guards; but their bonds were idle, for he expired in a few moments with a curse upon his lips that made those who heard it tremble.

Meanwhile the shrieks of the Queen, partly called forth by the physical agony consequent on her wound, and partly caused by terror for her unworthy brother, rang through the palace; nor could even the presence of the King and her children, or

the assurance that Zách was already dead, restore her to any degree of composure. In her alarm and suffering she forgot the origin of the catastrophe; and in the intervals of her bodily anguish she called loudly for vengeance. At once alarmed and exasperated, unconscious of the provocation which the murdered Magnate had received, and keenly alive to the danger of the precedent which had been that day established by the desecration of the royal residence, Charles Robert eagerly and solemnly promised all she wished; and vowed that none in whose veins ran the blood of Felician Zách, be they whom they might, should survive to vaunt his treason.

It was a fearful pledge, but it was redeemed. In the fortress of the brave old Magnate the officers of the royal household found his maniac daughter, seated in a niche of the deserted hall, weaving chaplets of wild flowers which she had gathered on the ramparts, and then tearing them asunder and scattering them to the winds, with a wild laugh, half anguish and half madness. They bore her to Viségrád, nor did she attempt any opposition to their will; until as they passed beneath the spacious

arch of entrance, she espied her destroyer pacing to and fro the lime avenue which had once been her own favourite retreat ; when, with a shrill cry, she bounded from the side of her captors, and rushing headlong down the steep declivity as though a sudden memory of her shame had come back upon her, plunged into the turbid river that was boiling and rioting beneath.

When at length they drew her to the land she was a corse ; but the vengeance of Charles Robert was not satisfied by her death ; and forgetful alike of the beauty and the gentleness which had so often beguiled his weary hours, he commanded that the body of the maiden should be flung beside that of her father ; and that her young brother should be immediately summoned from Buda without a hint of the catastrophe which awaited him.

Full of hope and of ambition the young and noble boy arrived at Viségrád, his heart swelling with delight at the promised favour of the King, and the vaunted loveliness of his sister. On his advent being announced to Charles Robert, he directed that the youth should be forthwith conducted to the chamber where lay the bodies of all that he had

best loved on earth, and there put to death ; and once more he was obeyed ; but with a humanity which did them honour, his officials profited by the deep faint that fell upon the unhappy boy as the ghastly spectacle was revealed ; and struck him to the heart ere he could be conscious of the death-pang.

This done, the three bodies were mutilated until scarcely a vestige remained of what they once had been ; then tied to the tails of horses ; and thus dragged through the public streets ; and finally, when every imaginable indignity had been heaped upon them, flung to the dogs in an obscure and filthy suburb of the city, with a proclamation that whosoever should venture to collect their remains together for burial, should be held as partakers of their treason, and dealt with accordingly.

It will be readily believed that with so fearful an example of the King's ruthless cruelty before their eyes, none attempted to rescue the mangled bodies from desecration ; and the dogs were yet battening on the unholy food, and disputing limb by limb what had lately been so brave and so beautiful, when the undying fury of the Queen, and the inhu-

man assent of the Monarch, had hunted down and destroyed every relative, however remote, of the doomed family of Zách, which was swept from the face of the earth through the dastardly crime of Casimir of Poland.

Tradition tells, that from this period the arms of Charles Robert were palsied by a curse—and who shall say that it was lightly earned?

John of Hommonaï, the expectant bridegroom, and the devoted lover, when he learnt the fate of Clara, the fair, and pure, and innocent girl, whom he had worshipped, and who had preferred an early and a painful death, to a life of shame and dis-honour, never again looked with love upon the face of woman; but eagerly proffering his welcome assistance to every leader who was bound for a field of blood, soon terminated his career as a soldier should do; and died with his weapon in his hand where the slain lay thickest, after a day of hard-won glory.

It is gravely asserted by the old chroniclers, that the spirit of the martyred Clara long haunted the halls and galleries of Viségrád “i’ the glimpses o’ the moon;” and that to the day of his death the

visions of Charles Robert were full of the mutilated phantom. Be this as it may, however, it is certain that there is no tradition throughout the country more fully and satisfactorily authenticated than that of the fair and unfortunate Clara Zách.

CHAPTER IV.

“ You have indeed nobly revenged our sex, my good Sir ;” said the Lady of Revay, as the deep stillness bore witness to the termination of the tale ; “ and we may now afford to listen to legends of feast and fray, of broil and battle, for some hours to come, without feeling that we are wronged by the narrators, or that chivalry has superseded courtesy.”

“ Time wears, nevertheless :” observed M. D’Eödenffy : “ and if any one present be bold enough to profit by the indulgence of the Baroness, he must be speedy with his tale.”

“ Methinks my friend Báthory has escaped hitherto ;” remarked the Count Pálffy : “ and he of all others must find it an easy matter to supply us with a family chronicle well worth the hearing. How say you, Báthory ? Will you volunteer a legend, and thus save us the delay of trying the chances ?”

“ I am no orator :” laughed the individual to whom he had appealed ; “ and dare not recklessly expose myself to such an ordeal. It is well

for those who have bright eyes to inspire them, for they may afford to be adventurous ; but nothing less than the fiat of that chance which we have agreed to obey on this occasion, would induce me to prove my own inefficiency in an accomplishment so common to the circle ; and consequently I will not rashly brave my fate."

Recourse once more to the lots was accordingly imperative ; and great was the amusement of the party when it was discovered that the Count Báthory, by a singular coincidence, had actually drawn the number which condemned him to be the next speaker. As soon as the laughter elicited by the incident, in which he most cordially joined, had exhausted itself, he said gaily—

" So must it be then—but even yet I will be revenged ; for I will so thoroughly avail myself of Madame de Revay's promise, that I will tell a tale in which not even the name of a lady shall appear. Hearken therefore, ye who have compelled me to the task, to the legend of

THE BLACK CAPTAIN.

The issue of the fatal battle of Mohács delivered

over the kingdom of Hungary to intestine struggle. Ferdinand I. and Zápolya alike claimed the crown ; and as if to complete the ruin of the miserable country, Solyman the Magnificent, Emperor of the Turks—who had long nourished the hope of possessing himself of Buda, and gradually making himself master of the whole land—profiting by the harassed and defenceless state of the population, advanced with a powerful army to the city, which he took almost without encountering any resistance, and where he put every thing to fire and sword. Nor was it until the troubles which at that period broke out in Asia became so serious and threatening as to require his presence to suppress them, that he retired from the Hungarian capital, and subsequently from the country, carrying away with him into slavery two hundred thousand men, among whom were a great portion of the population of Buda ; and the city subsequently remained almost deserted, until Zápolya succeeded in once more persuading the terrified fugitives to return to their devastated dwellings.

The hope of the exhausted people, that one of the Christian rivals who were still contending for their

shivered sceptre, might prove sufficiently powerful to overcome and silence the claims of his adversary, and thus restore peace to the suffering land, was not fated to be realized; for the strength of the two parties was so equally balanced, that there appeared no prospect save that of anarchy and bloodshed.

In 1527, Ferdinand occupied Buda; a fearful tenure—for the city was at that period ravaged by the plague, the terrible legacy of its Moslem visitors! He was not however fated long to remain its master; for Zápolya, conscious that his Imperial adversary could never be displaced by his own unassisted efforts, flung himself into the arms of the Turks, and in 1529, Solyman once more appeared before the metropolitan city at the head of an immense army, as the declared ally of Zápolya; when the place was lost to Ferdinand through the treachery of the garrison, and several of the inhabitants were put to death, for having been accessory to its cession to the Emperor.

But so important a fortress was not to be resigned by Ferdinand without another attempt at its recapture; and accordingly the devoted city was once

more besieged by the Imperialists, who were eventually routed by the bravery of the citizens, and the vigilant zeal of the military commandant Nadásdy.

After the death of Zápolya, Isabella, his widowed Queen, anxious to dissolve the unnatural league entered into by her husband with the Infidels, pledged herself to Ferdinand, under certain conditions to deliver over to him not only the capital, but the whole country; and upon the faith of this promise he again attacked Buda, in 1541. The party of the deceased King, however, refused to ratify her pledge; and when the Imperialists sat down before the city, they called upon the Turks to assist them; an appeal which met with instant and eager assent, but which ultimately proved the ruin of both parties; for Solyman finding himself once more master of the coveted capital and stronghold of the Magyars, immediately declared his determination to hold his conquest; and possessing himself of the person of the infant sovereign, John Sigismund Zápolya, he garrisoned Buda with twelve thousand Janissaries, and reduced a great portion of the country into a Turkish province.

The plague, contagion, and fires—all those fear-

ful evils which ever came in the train of the Moslem, were frequent ; the churches were desecrated, the Christian population degraded, and demoralization and misery stalked over the land.

Under these wretched auspices commenced the year 1569, which had been made the subject of an ancient prophecy ; and in which it was declared that evil was to come upon the Infidels ; a prediction so welcome to their Christian victims, that it was believed by sage as well as simple, and had long been a source of anxious anticipation. It was consequently with considerable disappointment that the suffering people saw the first months of the fateful year go by without producing any change in the position of either themselves or their task-masters ; and with comparative delight that at the close of spring, they welcomed the intelligence that an individual had suddenly made his appearance at Debretzin, calling himself the Black Captain, and declaring that he was a divine delegate, sent to rid the Hungarian nation of the yoke of the Infidel ; a task which, relying on the strength that would be afforded to him from above, he was ready and eager to undertake, with the assistance of any

handful of men who might volunteer to aid in the great work. The rumour, wild as it was, sufficed to rally in an instant all the dormant energies of the wilfully deluded Christians : they felt that scarcely anything short of a miracle could release them from their present miserable state of thraldom ; and they immediately began to prophecy, in their turn, emancipation to themselves, and defeat to the merciless Infidels.

Nor was the report wholly groundless ; for it was a fact that a peasant called George Karátson, a man of extraordinary appearance, and extreme cunning (who had been generally shunned by his neighbours, in consequence of his very dark complexion, which almost amounted to black), having heard of the prophecy, and perceiving, as the months wore on, no probable sign of its realization, resolved to profit by the universal superstition, had actually declared himself to be the appointed instrument of divine retribution on the Moslem.

Nature had endowed Karátson with such unusual muscular strength, that the physical feats which he performed to secure the conviction of the few sceptics who approached him, were matter of awe and

marvel to all his followers ; while the peculiar tint of his skin, swarthy as that of a Hottentot, his long, wiry, raven-black hair and beard, and the strange fitful gleam of an eye that seemed to emit lightnings, were not without their effect upon the credulous multitude. Gigantic in stature, supple of limb, and moreover skilled in those subtleties of speech which were as rare as they were powerful in that remote age, the peasant of Debretzin seemed especially fitted to enact the lie which his spirit had engendered ; and when he abandoned the plough, and seized the battle-axe, proclaiming himself to be the instrument of a higher power, he encountered few of his own class who were disposed to investigate his claim.

Having possessed himself of the attention of his countrymen, his next task was to excite their respect and wonder ; and he found it equally easy with the first. It is only when assertions are unpalatable and unprofitable, that men begin to question, and to analyse their validity : when they find them flatter alike their wishes and their interest, they accept them greedily, and admit them readily ; and thus it was with the statements of the prophet-peasant

when he told that a divine revelation had been vouchsafed to him, in which his mission had been developed ; and their trust in their new champion was increased tenfold on his assertion a few weeks subsequently, that he had been favoured with a second visitation, in which the Supreme Master whom he was called upon to serve, had upbraided him with his tardiness in the work ; had reminded him that he was selected from the very dregs of the people only to enhance the glory of the Great Power of which he was the instrument ; and had called upon him in a loud voice to be up and ready, for that the hour was come !

These mystical harangues, which were delivered in a voice at once sweet and sonorous, and with such gesticulation as Hercules would have loved to use in his discourse, were followed by feats of muscular strength which produced an equal effect upon his auditors. When he addressed the crowd which never failed to follow upon his footsteps, he caused iron chains and cannon balls to be placed near him ; and rending the first asunder like bands of flax, and casting the others into the air as though they had been made of gossamer, he called upon

his astonished hearers to say if these were indeed the feats of a mere mortal, dependent only upon his own powers.

Multitudes love the marvellous : human nature in the mass is always excitable : the leaven is never wanting ; and Karátson no sooner found himself at the head of a mob of disorderly persons, who having nothing to lose and everything to gain by change, never questioned the validity of his claims, than he established his camp outside the city ; and faithful to his original plan of mystification, forbade access to his army to all who refused to undergo certain mysterious ceremonies, which he declared to be indispensable to his followers, and which they were solemnly sworn never to reveal.

The spot of inauguration was a clear space situated in a thick forest near the city, whence the trees had receded in a circle with such regularity as almost to give to the place the appearance of having been produced by art. The tall pines and dense elms by which it was surrounded sufficed, however, to cast a dimness over it quite in unison with the feeling of blended mystery and awe which the arch-impostor was anxious to inspire in his fol-

lowers ; while the mystic whisperings of the leaves as the wind swept through them, seemed to deepen the stillness which they were too subdued to disturb.

As each recruit was led into this forest ring, he found himself face to face with Karátson, whose gigantic figure was entirely shrouded by a long and ample cloak of black serge, girt about his waist with a leathern girdle, into which were inserted a huge pair of steel-barrelled pistols ; while thick masses of his hair fell in wild confusion about his face and shoulders. For a second or two the most perfect silence was preserved ; and few were they among the uninitiated who would have had nerve to break it, when they stood for the first time in that dim light, and in front of the sable giant whom they believed to be endowed with superhuman attributes.

Suddenly the deep voice broke upon their ear ; and slowly and solemnly the duties to which they were required to pledge themselves, were recapitulated by the man who impiously styled himself the soldier of the Most High ; and in the midst of the harangue, he abruptly stepped up to the neophyte, and seizing him by the hair, he

lifted him three several times from the earth, muttering hurriedly and hoarsely a mass of unintelligible words ; and then giving him three slight blows upon the breast, and a kiss upon the forehead, he bestowed upon him the paternal blessing, calling him “ dear son,” and bidding him thence-forward look upon and address every member of the Army of Faith as his brother, save himself, who was the father of all, and to whom the most blind obedience must be unhesitatingly conceded.

Each sunrise and sunset the drum beat to prayers, where the self-elected delegate recited the service aloud ; after which, from some rising ground, he gave a general blessing.

No oath was ever heard throughout the camp, for the most frightful punishment would have attended its utterance ; no game or sport, however innocent, was permitted ; the only relaxation of the soldiery being feats of arms and trials of strength, which might tend to render them greater proficients in the art of war ; and constantly-recurring prayer, during which the impostor professed to receive instructions from on high for the guidance of his followers.

Had this been all, the existence of an army of

fanatics would have been of small importance to the country; but such was far from being the case; for however diligently Karátson affected to enforce the duties of prayer, he was infinitely less rigorous in his exaction of honesty: and thus the soldiers of the Black Captain continually rose from their knees, not only to attack and to possess themselves of the castles of such nobles as were too weak to resist their numbers, but even to intrude themselves into less dignified habitations for the ignoble purpose of plunder, which they courteously excused to the defrauded owners by pleading the necessities of their camp, and promising tenfold indemnification from their first Turkish booty.

At the close of autumn, Karátson found himself at the head of about two thousand men; but to his great disappointment they were all from the very dregs of the people—not a single individual of mark or birth having joined his banner; and he could not disguise from himself that his artifice, instead of placing him in command of a liberating army, had merely made him the Captain of a powerful body of freebooters.

Disgusted at his failure, but nevertheless resolved

not to abandon his project, this extraordinary man at once determined on changing his whole plan of action; and accordingly he collected his band, and having delivered to them a discourse compounded of piety and arrogance, concluded his address by dismissing them for the present from their duties, upon the plea that during the winter no expedition against the Infidels could be judiciously undertaken; but warning them to assemble on the first day of March, when he pledged himself to lead them to victory and conquest.

This done, and himself left untrammelled, the self-styled Delegate occupied the entire winter in travelling from place to place, ostensibly for the purpose of levying recruits, but in reality with far different views. Having once tasted the pleasures of authority and power, he could not reconcile himself to the prospect of a relapse into his original insignificance; and therefore resolved to achieve greatness at any price or risk. Crafty, subtle, and uncompromising, he no sooner discovered that he had failed as a hero, for that even the eager superstition of the time had not sufficed to deceive a single magnate into the belief of his infallibility,

than he sat calmly down to revolve in his own mind the most promising means of self-aggrandisement; and it was after the earnest vigil of a long and anxious night, that all his convictions pointed to —treason!

He had no religious compunction in adopting this new expedient; for he felt that the very prayers with which for months he had been mocking the ear of the Omnipotent, had raised up the strong barrier of hypocrisy between him and Heaven, and that it was one which never could be broken down! He had no dread of man's contempt, for it had been his birthright and his heritage: he had no proud name to blast, for he had been born a bondsman as his fathers were, and beyond his own village no lip had ever breathed it; until, through his own crime—the crime by which the angels fell—he had made it a byword through the country.

It was a strange position—that of this bold bad man, standing alone in his sin, without one kindred spirit on which to lean, or with which to sympathise—worshipped as a prophet and a deliverer by a rude host of his fellow-peasants; and contemplated by others with a wondering curiosity, like that with

which the eye follows the mysterious fires born of corruption, uncertain whether they will at length gain strength enough to injure.

The doubt did not long exist within his own breast. All the strongholds of that division of the country between the Raab and the Theiss, were in the hands of the Moslem, and consequently subject to re-capture by the Magyars, whenever a change of fortune might enable them to enforce their restoration ; and this consciousness compelled the Infidel garrisons to exert a constant and unremitting vigilance, from which they would gladly, as Karátson was well aware, purchase exemption at a high price.

His path once mentally defined, he forthwith proceeded without hesitation to follow it ; and remembering the cost of life at which the Turks had become possessed of the fortress of Szolnok, he determined to commence operations by offering his services to the Pasha who held it. The difficulty, however, lay in obtaining a private interview with that important and almost inaccessible personage ; who, conscious of the immense importance of his trust, and jealous of treachery, saw an enemy in

every stranger, and resolutely kept the gates of the castle closed against all intrusion. But Karátson was not to be foiled on the very threshold of his enterprise by any obstacle; and he accordingly applied himself craftily in the neighbourhood to ascertain the peculiar foible of the individual against whom he had to play the game of cunning; nor was he long in learning its nature, for it was one too common among the Orientals, and too much dependent upon display, to remain a mystery.

Karátson smiled contemptuously as he listened. He should owe his success to a handful of jewels—to gauds and frippery! It could not have better chanced; for he could pay the price in plunder. But he was well aware that he could not pass the walls of Szolnok invisibly, in order to spread his treasures before the gloating eyes of the Pasha; and equally felt that in his Christian garb he had little prospect of again leaving them alive. His resolution was taken at once; his elf-locks and his disordered beard favoured the deceit; and habiting himself in the squalid and unsavoury garments of an Israelite, and thrusting the jewels which were to be his passport to the Pasha's presence into the

folds of the tattered shawl that he bound about his waist, he provided himself with a heavy walking-staff, and at dawn one morning was discovered seemingly spent with toil at the gates of Szolnok.

His first salutation was a curse, as the Moslem sentinel spat upon the ground, and anathematized him in the name of Allah; but when the impostor raised his voice, and craved to be admitted to an audience of the powerful Pasha who held the fortress, the Turk turned aside in contemptuous disgust and declined further parley.

Two hours passed by; and still the pretended Jew crouched patiently and uncomplainingly beside the gate of the fortress; for although his heart burnt with curses, the calm never left his lip. He played for a stake too heavy to be perilled by a hasty word.

As he sat in his abject posture, apparently busied in soothing the fatigue of his weary limbs, the Pasha of Szolnok appeared upon the walls for the purpose of making his early round among the guards; and his quick eye at once fell upon the stranger.

“Allemdullilah!” he exclaimed angrily: “What

does yonder wretch stretched at our very gate? Is this a seemly object to meet the morning glance of a True Believer? Was there no one to whip the hound hence, ere I was compelled to look upon him?"

A hundred hands were ready as he spoke; but the arch-impostor was as prompt with his cunning as the servile followers of the Moslem with their lash; and drawing from his girdle a large gem upon which the morning sun glinted in jets of light, he laid it upon his palm, and held it towards the Pasha.

" May the shadow of your Highness never be less!" he said, bowing his body to the earth, and crossing his arms over his breast: " May your name be great in the land, and the years of your sons flourish! I am but a poor Jew-merchant, trading in precious gems, and forced to sell them at a mean price in order to supply my necessities, which are heavy in this accursed land, where I find no rest for the sole of my foot. I have now, however, seen the mighty Pasha of Szolnok, and I will repine no more, but go on my way rejoicing."

" Dog!" said the great man in reply; " Would you mock me to my beard? Are you an ass, and

the father of asses, that you would have me believe that you possess anything which it might become me to purchase?"

"My soul be the forfeit if I gladden not the eyes of my lord, should he condescend to turn them on his slave;" was the calm rejoinder, as the pretended trader began to fumble amid his rags for a fresh object of temptation.

The Pasha had, however, reasons of his own for not permitting a further display of the Jew's merchandize before his attendants; and satisfied by the beauty of the one jewel which had already been exhibited to him that the wares of the stranger were of no common quality, he said hastily:—

"Enough, enough—you are worn and weary with the road; and you are alone, and can work no evil—your face is whitened; I will see your trinkets, and perhaps purchase them, should they meet my pleasure." And then turning to a Janissary who stood near him, he desired that the Jew should be immediately conducted into the castle.

The heart of Karátson beat high; the first and the most difficult step was accomplished; and he had

few fears for the result ; while the Pasha, having previously ascertained that the squalid wanderer was totally unarmed, retained only a single Aga beside him when he received his abject visitor. A moment had sufficed to determine his plans. It would amuse his weariness to examine the treasures of the Jew ; and should they prove worthy of transfer to his own hoards, it would not be difficult under the circumstances to effect that transfer with advantage, and then to reflect upon the ultimate provision to be made for their vendor ; while in the event of failure on his part, a criminal design would be at once evident, which would seal his destiny.

It was a fateful hour for Karátson, but he knew the nature of the man with whom he came to treat ; and he followed his formidable guide to the presence of the Pasha without the sinking of a pulse.

The interview was a long one ; and before it terminated, the Moslem leader had possessed himself of half a score of jewels of which the magnificent Solyman might have been proud ; and a heavy sum had been pledged to the Black Captain, in consideration of his delivering up by some subtle treachery his whole army to the Turks. The bribe

received by the Pasha was to form no part of the ostensible negociation, but to be considered merely as a private arrangement between the parties themselves; while the money to be paid to the traitor was to be drawn from the Imperial treasury, and to recompense him for the destruction of one of those restless, homeless, and desperate bodies of men who formed the most threatening obstacle to the quiet possession of the Infidels in Hungary.

These preliminaries arranged, the Black Captain, fettered by an awful vow which, villain as he was, even he would have never dared to violate, returned to his head-quarters, and commenced strenuous efforts to complete the equipment of his army; and on the first day of March, according to his own direction, his followers once more assembled, strengthened by the numerous proselytes whom they had made during their absence; and the fanatic camp again whitened the plain in the neighbourhood of Debretzin.

No sooner were the internal arrangements of the army completed, than Karátson, after a morning spent in public prayer, declared that the period for the fulfilment of the prophecy was near at hand;

and that he should set forth on the third day, until whose dawn the troops must pass their whole time in religious and military exercises, in order to fit themselves for the great task which they were called upon to perform.

His commands were implicitly obeyed; and nothing was heard throughout the camp save the voice of prayer, the clash of steel, and the measured tramp of armed men.

At dawn on the appointed day, Karátson sprang from his rude couch, and throwing back the curtain of his tent gazed out upon the scene before him, dimly visible through the veil of mist which was rising from the plain. Far as his eye could reach along the level, spread the canvass dwellings of the moving host whom he had himself conjured together by a lie. “Fools!” he muttered from between his clenched teeth; “Fools! Idiots! Madmen! Shall I forego my ambition for such as ye, as my midnight dream would seem to prompt? For such as ye—who, without one question or misgiving, have entered eagerly into the snare that I—the peasant-churl—the mean bondsman—the despised serf Karátson,—spread so coarsely for ye? And wherefore? Are

there dainty consciences among you ? So be it ; they will atone for the rest ; and thus balance the sin. But no, no ; the sack of the castle and the plunder of the village go on as blithely while the breath of prayer is yet upon your lips, as though you were vowed to another master. We are worthy of each other—you toil for what you covet, and you obtain it ; the coarse enjoyment of the wine-flask, and the crowded board ;—and truly you tarry not long for your reward—I labour for gold, and power, and a name,—not such a name as my fellow-bondsmen gave me when we talked together of the tasks to be wrought, and the lash to be escaped, but one which shall make all Hungary ring, whether it be in wonder or in abhorrence ! And this, be but the fates propitious, I will win ——”

As the accents died away upon his lips, a slight stir and a faint murmur were awakening in the camp ; and ere long all the mighty mass was astir ; while the first object which met their gaze as they emerged from their rest, was the gigantic figure of their leader in strong relief against the eastern sky, across which the newly-risen sun had extended its bright and many-coloured banner. The tent of

Karátson had been pitched upon the only spot of raised ground within the confines of the camp, and was distinguished from those of his followers merely by the black flag which floated from its summit, and the black cross that was painted upon its canvass walls; but not one of the armed and fanatic host looked towards it on that morning without a feeling of expectant awe; and their leader no sooner ascertained that every tent had given up its inmates, than he raised his voice to a hoarse scream, and flinging himself into violent contortions, called upon them to approach him, and to hear from his own lips the revelations which had been vouchsafed to him during the watches of the past night.

In a few moments all the anxious and credulous army were kneeling in dense masses at the foot of the mound on which stood their arch betrayer; and then, after a wild and vehement prayer, well calculated to excite the passions of his followers by draping violence in the garb of piety, he declared that it had been revealed to him that he must set forth at once with six hundred of his followers, and attack the castle of Szent-Miklos, which de-

fended the passage of the Theiss, whose walls would totter and fall at the sound of his trumpet ; while fire from on high would destroy the Turkish garrison. His troops were to arm themselves but slightly, and to make no provision for the journey ; all these things being cared for by a power to which they need only shew obedience, in order to carry death and terror with them wherever they appeared.

It is almost needless to say that all the army were anxious to volunteer in so promising an enterprise ; but Karátson silenced by a threat the clamour that had commenced among his followers ; and selecting six hundred of those men whom he knew to be the most zealous, and the most credulous, committed the command of the remainder to Ladislaus Szüt, whom he had appointed his lieutenant.

In a couple of hours the Black Captain and his chosen band left the camp, followed by the envy of their less fortunate comrades ; and so fully impressed were the poor deluded fanatics who followed him with the holiness of their mission, that for a long time they sustained without a complaint the exhaustion of fatigue and hunger ; but as time

wore on, and they still saw weary leagues before them, which must all be traversed ere they could reach the scene of the promised miracle, without any visible means of satisfying the cravings of their eager appetites, bitter murmurings against the authority that had compelled them to such unnecessary suffering began to grow among the troops, which passed unheeded by their leader, though they constantly met his ear; and he contented himself with moving quietly onward, occasionally addressing a few words of admonition to the turbulent, or encouraging the weak.

But this state of things could not long endure, for each passing hour only increased the evil; and at length just as the setting sun was cincturing the mountains with a girdle of fire, and crowning their lofty brows with circles of crimson light, the murmurs swelled into louder voice; and Karátson discovered that his little army, rendered desperate by travel and hunger, was in a state of open mutiny.

Still his courage and self-possession, each worthy of a better cause, did not forsake the traitor; but walking into the midst of them, and waving aloft

his strong and sinewy arm, he cried shame upon their want of faith; and bade them silence their selfish clamours, lest they should draw down upon themselves a vengeance from which none would be able to escape. When he saw that his bold and confident words had produced the desired effect, and that there were few among his followers who did not quail beneath them, he flung himself prostrate upon the earth, bare-headed and unarmed; and prayed with a loud voice that he might be forgiven for the heinous sin of having selected for the sacred service in which he was then engaged, such unworthy and unbelieving comrades; promising, should the wrath which he deprecated be indeed turned aside, that he would never so offend again; and finally, once more rising and resuming his cap and his weapons, he turned coldly towards his troops, and bade them return to the camp or at once disperse, as they might see fit, for that he would proceed to accomplish the great work alone.

Abashed, if not convinced, the weary and exhausted band confessed their error, and declared their readiness to follow him once more; a concession which was accepted coldly, and with apparent

reluctance ; nor was it until they had again moved forward for a few moments, that he exclaimed :

“ ‘Tis well ; ye are once more obedient to your duties ; and now learn, short-sighted fools ! that ere the lapse of another hour your wants shall be supplied.”

A joyful shout and an accelerated step proved the emotion which his words produced : one voice only demanded “ From whence can the supply come ?”

“ Go ask the cloud whence it derives the moisture with which it showers freshness upon the earth ;” was the stern reply of Karátson : “ and perchance, because it is thy pigmy will to learn the secret, the vapour will find a voice in which to answer. Are things like these to be questioned of by such as thee ?”

At once silenced and rebuked the man shrank back, and hid himself among his comrades ; while the arch-impostor moved forward with a firmer step, for he felt that the fanatics by whom he was followed could never again free themselves from his thrall.

His arrangements had been carefully made, and

his calculations as cunningly accomplished ; the hour that he had named was not yet ended when the little army entered a thick wood, in the midst of which, guided by the flickering of a watch-fire, they came upon an open space, where there were provisions enough collected to supply all their necessities. No one was to be seen : not a sound was to be heard, save the quivering of the leafy boughs, and the gurgling murmur of a small and pellucid stream which traversed the sylvan area ; until with one accord the followers of Karátson shouted aloud in wonder at the miracle, and at once prepared to throw themselves upon the food, in order to appease their ravening appetites ; but this was not yet to be, for once more the deep and reproachful voice of their mysterious leader burst upon their ears, even amid the din of joyful wonder, as he thundered forth an anathema against their sinful unbelief but an hour back ; and bade them kneel and pray for pardon, ere they ventured to partake of food intended only for such as were firm of faith.

That was, indeed, a moment of triumph to the Black Captain, for not one hand was outstretched

in disobedience ; and he stood there, in the midst of six hundred men, hungering and thirsting from a ten hours' fast of toil and exertion ; and his single voice sufficed to prostrate them all upon their knees, ere they satisfied their natural cravings for the food that was spread out before them. The prayer ended, Karátson did not deem it expedient to put the submission of his followers to any further test ; and they accordingly lost no time in feasting plentifully and drinking deeply ; nor did their subtle leader attempt to limit them in either indulgence.

The welcome miracle of this banquet in the wilderness raised the enthusiasm of the Celestial Army (for thus had the traitor-captain designated his forces), to the wildest pitch. They cast themselves upon the earth before him to sue for a more perfect forgiveness than he had yet conceded to their disloyalty ; and they had no sooner obtained his full pardon, than they dispatched two of their comrades back again to the general camp, with tidings of their progress, and the wonders which had been wrought for their solace and encouragement ; which so infatuated those who had remained behind, that,

despite the expostulations of Szüt, more than one hundred men deserted him, and defied his authority, in order to join the glorious expedition in whose favour such a mighty miracle had been performed; while many others who had joined the army either from necessity or curiosity, and who had hitherto refused to pledge themselves to the cause, took the oath of fealty to Karátson, and vowed themselves thenceforward to his service in every exigency.

Satisfied with his success, the Black Captain suffered his exhausted troops to remain in their forest-bivouac the whole of the ensuing day, which was passed by the renovated party in a wild and noisy merriment that reached its climax, when at nightfall, those of their comrades already alluded to as deserters from the camp of Szüt, made their appearance, and declared their resolution of participating in the triumphs of the expedition.

The rebuke of Karátson was so feeble when the rebels were conducted to his presence, that it served rather to enhance than to suppress the enjoyment of the evening; and the carouse was long and deep which awoke the echoes of the silent forest ere the

intemperate fanatics stretched themselves to rest beneath the overhanging boughs.

Few eyes watched that night; the sentinels nodded at their posts; the guards slumbered beside their watch-fire; and as the Black Captain paced to and fro, and occasionally strode slowly among the sleeping groups, he smiled in bitter and contemptuous scorn, for he saw that his vigil was unshared save by the cold clear moon, whose sharp and colourless light lay in flakes upon the fresh foliage of the umbrageous trees, and carpeted the earth with silver.

Karátson could not sleep. He was like the desperate gamester, who is about to make the last throw upon which his fortunes hinge. To the slumbering mass of life about him, the morrow at that hour was as nothing: to him it was all in all.

He spurned from his path the empty wine-flasks that lay scattered around, and to which many of those on whom he looked were indebted for the deep and heavy sleep into which they had fallen, as he alone was aware, for the last time; until that deadlier and final slumber should overtake

them, whence they could be aroused neither by the voice of ambition nor of indulgence.

He gazed around upon the victims of sensuality and superstition, whom he was about to deliver over to slaughter; and was satisfied that their mean vices were his sufficient apology, for he never speculated upon his own; and thus he watched till day-break, sleepless, remorseless, and unrepentant; and the first use that he made of the pure and holy light which once more brought day over the earth, was to arouse his still heavy troops into exertion, and to prepare them for the enterprise in which they were so soon to become actors.

The place of their bivouac was not far distant from the stronghold of Szent-Miklos; and a couple of hours' march brought them within sight of the turrets of the castle; which were no sooner perceptible than Karátson halted his force, and forbade, on punishment of death, that any sound which could reach the fortress should be made. Obedience to his commands was promptly promised; and he then, according to his custom in all great emergencies, threw aside his weapons, and cast himself upon the earth, indulging in those vio-

lent distortions of feature, and convulsions of body, amid which he professed to receive his mysterious instructions.

After a few moments had been spent in such extravagancies, in the midst of his awe-struck and gazing followers, the impostor rose, and lifting his arms above his head with a vehement gesture, he shouted aloud; when, instantly, as though it had only awaited his pleasure, a shower of fire burst over the sky immediately above the castle, and fell in a thick and threatening cloud into the very heart of the citadel; from whence there arose a cry so wild, so shrill, and so despairing, that the followers of Karátson never doubted that they had listened to the death-yell of the Infidels.

The Moslem garrison had played their part as craftily as the Black Captain had accomplished his own. The rockets had been fired as his voice reached them; and the shrill cry that arose as the spent fire sank back, was well calculated to deceive a less credulous enemy than that by which they were ostensibly threatened.

After so miraculous a demonstration as the one they had just witnessed, not an incredulous spirit

could be found among the troops of Karátson. Their own senses had convinced them that the first part of the prophecy was accomplished; and consequently all doubt was removed as to the issue of the expedition. It was therefore with eager joy that they obeyed their leader, when, grasping his weapon, he bade them advance and possess themselves of the fortress which had been so wonderfully given into their hands; nor were they surprised on their arrival before the walls to find them totally abandoned; but full of confidence and curiosity they pressed forward to the gates, which yielded to their efforts, and through which they passed with tumultuous haste, only to fall in scores beneath the heavy fire that was opened upon them by the garrison.

Surprised, bewildered, and powerless; ill-armed, and betrayed by the leader who should at such a moment have been their support, the unhappy fanatics discovered their mistake too late. Resistance was hopeless; and many who saw their comrades falling around them, while they were themselves uninjured, turned in the vain hope of securing safety by flight; but falling into an ambuscade,

they were all butchered by the Spahis of Szolnok, except Karátson himself (for whom a place of refuge had been prepared, in order that the Pasha might profit by his future services), and thirty of the band, who resolutely fought their way through the thronging Infidels, and succeeded in effecting their escape.

The intelligence carried by the fugitives to the fanatic camp created the greatest consternation. In vain did Ladislaus Szüt declare that should Karátson re-appear he would be able to retrieve this unexpected calamity; all was disappointment and discontent; and when, after the lapse of a few hours, the Black Captain did indeed stand once more among them, not even his arrogant assurance that he had performed his own share of the miracle, and that its subsequent failure was entirely attributable to the want of faith in those by whom he had been accompanied, sufficed to restore the confidence of his army. They refused explicitly to follow him on a second expedition which he was bold enough to propose as a means of retrieving their shattered fortunes; and answered every exhortation with taunts and bitter reproaches.

Not a day passed in which the desertions were not frequent; and the Black Captain could no longer conceal from himself that nothing less than some decided display of his power would suffice to prevent the dispersion of the troops. Of his lieutenant, Szüt, he was secure; for, like himself, he was too deeply compromised to find safety save in the co-operation of his present comrades; and among the ruffians who composed the army were many whom he knew would continue with him so long as there remained a hope of plunder; although such as had been attracted to his banner by religious superstition would listen to no compromise.

Accordingly, he determined to engage the selfishness of the former in his favour; and in order to effect this, he dispatched a messenger to the principal magistrate of Debretzin, instructing him to furnish forthwith both provisions and clothing for his troops, and to forward them without delay to the camp. But the star of Karátson had set. The neighbourhood of so strong a force had alarmed the vigilance of the civic authorities, and the very individual to whom he now addressed himself had already applied to the Imperialist General, Báthory,

for assistance, to protect Debretzin from the encroachments of the fanatics.

With the prospect of such powerful aid, the magistrate peremptorily refused the required supplies; and coupled his negative with a haughty and contemptuous invective against the peasant-leader and his band; which so enraged Karátson when it was reported to him by his envoy, that he immediately sprang to the saddle, and followed by forty of the most desperate of his men, rode into the town, and commanded that the magistrate should be brought before him.

His arrival had been so unexpected that refusal was unavailing, for there were no troops in the city to resist the mandate; and accordingly the incautious and helpless functionary appeared in the square of the city where the Black Captain had reined up his horse, with his staff of office in his hand, which was instantly struck from his grasp by Karátson, as he imperiously demanded the cause of his refusal to comply with his late demand.

The magistrate of Debretzin was no coward; and, moreover, he was sufficiently acquainted with the nature of the man with whom he had to deal to be

quite aware that no submission could now avert his fate : and with this conviction strong upon his mind, and a bitter scorn and hatred of the peasant-leader in his heart and upon his lip, he answered in as loud a tone.

So long had the Black Captain been accustomed to exact obedience and respect, that his blood boiled when he heard his authority ridiculed, and his mean origin made the subject of taunt and irony. His lip quivered with rage, and his hand grasped the mane of his horse so tightly that, had there been life in what he clutched, he must have forced it out ; but he listened patiently to the invectives of his intended victim, as though he scorned to spare himself one pang ; and then turning towards his band, he bade them hang up the wordy fool above the portal of a dwelling-house to which he pointed.

The citizens, however, could endure no more ; and hastily closing the city gates to prevent the entrance of any reinforcement to the band, they fell upon them suddenly, just as two of the party were dragging the wretched functionary to the spot indicated, with the rope about his neck.

The struggle was short and furious, for the fol-

lowers of Karátson, unprepared for any hostile demonstration on the part of the quiet burghers, were entirely off their guard ; and the numbers by whom they were assailed soon rendered all attempt to rally utterly hopeless. They nevertheless fought with desperation ; for they knew, that in the event of their being made prisoners, their doom was sealed. Thus, within an hour, the square of Debretzin resembled a shambles ; while among the few who were taken alive was the Black Captain himself, whose head was subsequently struck off by the city executioner, at the command of the civic authorities, an hour before sunset.

Szüt, enraged at the death of his captain, which he learnt on the morrow, immediately placed himself at the head of his whole force, and marched upon Debretzin ; promising his followers that should the town fall into their hands, they should be absolute and unrestrained masters of the place during three days, on the sole condition of swearing to revenge the fate of their late leader. The terms were too easy, and too congenial to the tastes of those whom he addressed, to meet with opposition ; and the inhabitants of the threatened city soon beheld

before their gates a ruffian army of two thousand men, eager for plunder, and habituated to blood.

The appearance of the fanatic force did not, however, create any apparent consternation in Debretzin. No effort was made for parley or capitulation ; and the Celestial Soldiers, as they loved to term themselves, marched into the city, where the troops of Báthory received them with a welcome too warm to be long sustained. A few escaped amidst the confusion, but the greater number were killed, and among the rest Ladislaus Szüt ; and thus ended the fanatical and threatening speculation of Karátson, which is still remembered throughout the country as the “ Black Man’s War.”

CHAPTER V.

“ You have indeed redeemed your pledge, my Lord Count;” smiled Madame de Revay, as Báthory concluded his narration ; “ and few of the fair ladies here present will, I think, be tempted to regret that none of the sex were fated to figure in a tale so replete with superstition and disloyalty. It is a painful reflection, that circumstances, however trying, should ever engender so utterly worthless an impostor as the hero of your tale.”

“ And yet it is scarcely strange that it should be so;” observed Pratnáyer ; “ particularly in a country like Hungary, which for more than three centuries was little else than one vast battle-field, surrounded by bristling fortresses whence the strong ejected the weak, and where each mail-clad Baron held feudal sway, and slept with his weapon at his thigh, ready at the first signal to rush once more to the conflict ; while Christians and Infidels alike made it the arena of strife and blood, of aggression and struggle ; and

feud and faction waxed fast and fierce, as if to complete the ruin commenced by external enemies."

"It is, however, startling to reflect upon those troublous times ;" said the host ; "and assuredly in no way can they be so thoroughly brought back to us as by the legends which have descended from father to son, through successive generations. It has been well said, that the *morale* of a country may be better understood from its proverbs than by the most laboured attempt at physiological analysis ; a truism which has never been confuted ; while, in like manner, it is equally evident that the history, the character, and the principles of a nation may be gathered from its traditions ; especially when, as you have just observed, they are handed down orally in the very families whose ancestors have figured as their heroes ; nor is there any doubt that, after making due allowance for a shade of superstition peculiar to the times, they are sufficiently valuable and authentic to serve as material for history, quite as trustworthy as the multitudinous 'Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de—' by which the French writers so frequently enrich the annals of the past."

"It is a position which does not admit of argument ;" said the Prussian ; " and your Magyar chronicles are still almost an unworked mine. It is true that both Medniánsky and Mailáth have partially turned their attention to this interesting subject ; and that V. Josika is basing the best of his admirable novels upon the by-past history of his father-land, while one or two other writers have contributed a solitary legend to your periodical literature ; but much remains to be done ; and, as in the case of the present narrations, such tales may fairly be regarded as an episodical history of Hungary, and will be held at no mean value by those who feel the importance of individual heroism and personal courage, qualities that are decidedly the strong hinges upon which revolved the mighty machine of national power, in an age and time when the sword made the law, and a man's best inheritance was a stout heart and a nervous arm. Taking this view of the subject, there can be no doubt but that a rich vein of ore only requires the working of a skilful hand ; and I trust that such an one will soon be found."

"And meanwhile ;" exclaimed Pálffy gaily, let us secure a faithful memory and a willing voice.

I have strong forebodings that this will be our last evening in the castle ; for if my ear deceive me not, I heard the fall of more than one heavy mass of snow from the battlements during the narration of Báthory ; and such being the case, I vote that we profit by the few hours which remain to us.”

“ My favourite ruin of Trenschin, celebrated as it is in history, has hitherto only obtained allusive mention ;” said M. D’Eödenffy. “ Will no one volunteer to become its chronicler ?”

“ That will I ;” said the pale student ; “ if by so doing I can afford pleasure to my listeners ; for during the last summer I spent a couple of months in the town, and amused myself, after I had become familiar with the intricacies of the ruin, with collecting all the historical and romantic tales connected with the castle.”

“ I was less fortunate ;” said the Baron Pratnáyer ; “ for during my hurried survey of the Wág valley, I could barely afford an hour to this interesting relic of antiquity ; but the position of the fortress struck me as being one of the finest and most picturesque things in nature. The lofty rock of sand-stone, with its occasional masses of blue

marble veined with white, starting out of the matrix in all sorts of fantastic forms, and flinging off the vegetation which flourishes so rankly on the more yielding and level surface of the acclivity, is a noble pedestal to the far-stretching and regal pile which crowns it; while the panorama that greets the eye from the summit of the square tower, is beyond all expression beautiful."

"It is at once the most spacious and the most ancient ruin in the country ;" said the host. " Of its antiquity, indeed, tales are told that are not only apochryphal but undeniably fabulous. The most probable assertion is, that it was founded by one of the Roman tribes who located themselves in the vicinity. The boldness of its construction, and the enormous masses of stone of which it is formed, afford a curious study to the modern architect, who might well have pronounced such an undertaking impossible, did not the remains of the gigantic work still exist to attest its reality."

"One of the earliest traditions connected with the castle of Trenschin :" observed the student ; " is that the rock was once the property of two brothers, and that during the absence of the elder, the

younger profited by the opportunity to erect a fortress on the table-land which occurs midway of the rock ; whence, according to the predatory habits of the time, he levied tribute on all the boats that descended the Wáag, which at that period flowed at the foot of the height ; while the small village that had grown up under the walls, was seated on the opposite side of the citadel, and completely overshadowed by the giant mountains of the Carpathian range.

“On his return to Trenschin, the elder brother congratulated himself on his kinsman’s forethought, and prepared to join him in his stronghold ; when to his surprise he found the gate closed against him, and learned with an indignation for which language has no words, that his brother disclaimed his right to profit by a labour in which he had not shared, and accompanied the announcement by the taunting remark, that the summit of the rock which must necessarily be the birthright of the eldest born, still remained unoccupied ; and that he had only to erect upon it a fortress of his own. Those were the days when might made right, and the sword was the only lawgiver ; and thus there was no ap-

peal for the angry Knight, who in his exasperation declared that even so it should be, and that woe should betide all whom he might reach from his vantage-ground.

“ Strange to say, even when his first rage had exhausted itself, and that he saw the difficulty of the undertaking in all its magnitude, the desire of revenge upon the brother who had outwitted him, determined him to persist in his resolution. In this desperate undertaking he was ably seconded by his equally enraged followers; and a tall tower was accordingly erected on the very crest of the rock, for which the materials were collected at an immense cost of human labour; the younger brother and his garrison looking on meanwhile in scornful amusement.

“ When once the tower was completed, however, the contemptuous mirth of the well-housed Knight and his people was soon changed into anxious annoyance; for not a human being could expose himself on the walls of the citadel who was not immediately made a mark for the arrows of the archers above his head; and so rapidly was the garrison thinned by this ceaseless persecution, while

no reprisal could be made, that eventually the younger Knight was compelled to forego both his pride and his selfishness, and to crave a reconciliation with his offended kinsman, which was after some show of reluctance conceded ; and the brothers once more united, their combined efforts extended the boundaries of the stronghold, by enclosing the tower within the outer walls, and thus rendering it a portion of the fortress against which it had been raised in feud."

" An ingenious tale, but decidedly a mere fable ; " said the Baron Pratnäyer ; " for it is evident at a glance that the upper and the lower fortresses have been erected at different periods, not more from the nature of their materials than from the fashion of their architecture. Thus the foundation of a portion of the inferior castle, with a stretch of wall on either hand, broken at intervals by small round towers, loop-holed and castellated, and replete with spiral stairs and vaulted dungeons, are decidedly of Cyclopedean fabric, having huge masses of the native blue marble imbedded in the hoary walls ; while traces of Roman architecture are conspicuous throughout the upper portions of the edifice, which

are in many places entirely composed of the peculiar brick used by that remarkable people, united by that iron-like cement of which the secret is now lost ; while it is not the less certain that much of the building is of mixed style and material, such as might belong to any age or country, had not Time pressed his mysterious signet upon all alike, and stamped it with the symbol of undeniable antiquity."

" There is a peculiarity about Trenschin which to me is remarkably striking ;" observed Pálffy ; " I allude to the extraordinary profusion of magnificent wild-flowers that carpet the base of the crumbling towers. The effect produced is singular, as the eye wanders from the stupendous and time-touched battlements to the fresh and beautiful blossoms by which the earth beside them is carpeted. The deep blue larkspur, the wood anemone, the wild mignonette, the fantastic orchis, and a score of others flourish amid the gray old walls of Trenschin in a profusion and perfection that I never remember to have seen elsewhere ; while the wild fig-tree and the elder form leafy roofs over many an obscure recess, creating beauty out of decay."

" The most interesting remain of the fortress as

a detail ;" remarked the pale student ; " is decidedly the church, which lies at the base, or rather upon the first elbow of the ascent, and has evidently been originally an appendage to the lower citadel. It is of small dimensions, and extremely plain in its design and decoration, save indeed as regards its monumental treasures, which are highly curious, embracing as they do every representative of the illustrious race of the Illéházys, so long the lords of the formidable stronghold ; but although their effigies adorn the chapel, and that several of the female branches of the family are buried in the chancel, and near the foot of the high altar, the remains of the chiefs occupy a vault immediately beneath the shrine, which is accessible from without, and occasionally opened to gratify the curiosity of any stranger who may chance to have nerve and taste to visit its solemn recesses."

" I confess to having done so ;" said Pálffy.

" And I also ;" resumed the student ; " nor shall I readily forget the painful impression made upon my mind by my insatiable and morbid love of the mysterious and the melancholy. It so chanced, as indeed must frequently be the case from the paucity

of strangers in that remote place, that this charnel-house had not been opened for many months ; and as the door was flung back, and we descended the flight of stone steps leading downwards to the still, cold, dwelling-place of decay and death, the effluvia was frightful!—It is strange ;” he continued after the pause of a moment, as he shook back his long hair, and sunk his voice almost to a whisper ; “ Very strange that there is no decay so loathsome as that of humanity.—But why should I dwell upon such details as these ? Rather let me redeem my pledge, and tell you another tale of the times of Charles Robert ; not so regal as that to which we have just listened, but at the same time infinitely less tragic.”

THE LION-STONE.

The most persevering and formidable enemy of the Neapolitan sovereign who had been received as King of Hungary on the extinction of the Arpádian dynasty, was Matthias Count of Tren-schin, and Lord of the Wáag, whom the weak Pretender, Wenzel of Bohemia, had created Palatine. Long after all the estates had recognised Charles

Robert, he still remained in arms against him ; and his property consequently suffered most severely ere he finally surrendered.

When the hour came in which he was compelled to tender his submission, this powerful noble found himself beggared by the confiscation of all his possessions to the crown ; and on the restoration of peace the dispersed inhabitants of the county returned to their devastated dwellings. Scarcely, however, had they resumed their rural avocations when a new terror fell upon the population. The evil was but slight in its commencement ; the shepherds who tended their flocks upon the mountains complained from time to time of the loss of a single sheep ; and for a while it was the general belief that wolves had located themselves in the neighbourhood.

Soon, however, the destruction became so great that the herdsmen were compelled to abandon the higher sheep-walks, and to lead their flocks into the recesses of the valley ; but so far from delivering themselves from their invisible scourge, they only succeeded in bringing out a more frightful feature in the picture ; for whereas, the victims of the

mysterious visitation had hitherto only been a stray sheep or goat which had wandered from its companions, children who had been seen gambolling among the flowers, or on the banks of the mountain-stream, were now missing in their turn; while traces of blood, and fragments of clothing, betrayed too miserably the nature of their fate.

The valley became a scene of terror and misery. Mothers were wringing their hands, and bewailing their little ones; and still, despite every endeavour to discover the cause of the evil, no vestige of the common enemy could be found. Every one believed that any increase of suffering would be impossible; and the incapability of deciding upon the exact nature of the evil against which they had to guard, and their consequent ignorance of the proper measures to be adopted, gave so dark an aspect to the misfortune, already sufficiently great in itself, that hopelessness fell upon the inhabitants of the neighbourhood; who were compelled to satisfy themselves by fastening their children within their squalid hovels, when they went forth to their labour in the fields and forests.

The ringing laughter of childhood, and the glad

song of youth and love, no longer made the valley vocal. It was as though some demon-finger had pointed out the blooming spot for destruction, body and spirit; and a listlessness fell upon the persecuted people, which was, however, fated to be fearfully dispelled; for the children were no sooner secured from sacrifice, than the woodsman who had gone forth with his axe, and the peasant with his spade, alike failed to return; and many became the desolate homesteads scattered over the mountain.

Then rumours grew, each more frightful than the last; and terror took such firm hold even of the bravest, that many boldly asserted that they had caught a distant glimpse of the Destroyer. No faith could, however, be placed in their declarations; for each had given to the hateful monster the form and fashion of his own peculiar antipathy. One stalwart forester declared that while protected from its observation by the bole of a centenary oak, he had seen a monstrous dragon creeping stealthily along, whose lips dropped blood and foam, while its forked tail and huge unwieldy body were covered with scales that caught the sunlight among the branches, and threw out sparks of fire. Another,

equally imaginative, and not less timid, asserted that he had once at dawn observed a snake of many furlongs in length, writhing along the mountain side, and at intervals collecting its slimy folds into dense volumes, that as they lay heaped together, formed a mound higher than the roof of his own hut; while ever and anon, it shot out its barbed tongue, and some fluttering bird which was just coming on buoyant wing to hail the dawn, fell quivering into its capacious jaws.

Either of these tales, could they have been proved, would have been bad enough; yet still there would have remained the hope that the monster might be ultimately overcome: and accordingly, the trembling peasants as they went forth to their compulsory labour, glanced anxiously on all sides, starting at every sound, and at every flickering of the sunshine, and mentally devising a thousand wild and impossible schemes for the destruction of the monster. But when Gabor, the oldest hunter of the province, who had hitherto listened to every rumour without comment; and in reply to all questioning, had only shook his head like one who cared not to fling away his words idly—when Gabor at

length declared that he had at last actually seen the mysterious cause of their common dismay, any doubt as to the veracity of the tale which they were to hear from his lips, never entered the minds of his simple listeners.

“ What were a fiery dragon, my friends ; ” commenced the gray-haired Gabor, with a still more expressive shake of the head than any with which he had hitherto permitted himself to increase the terror of his associates : “ What were a fiery dragon, or a league-long serpent, while we have brave hearts and strong arms ready to make common cause against a common danger ? We might at last have overcome any monster upon the earth ; but even this hope is not left to us. Why ?—if the tales of Josef and Ladislaus were true, instead of being as they are, the mere creations of a terrified imagination, have not other eyes looked upon the horrors they described ? ”

“ Aye, why indeed ? ” murmured several of the excited peasants who were grouped about him, leaning upon their axes and rifles, their long locks streaming in the wind, and their parted lips and eager eyes betraying the intensity of their interest ;

“Aye, why indeed, Gabor; when we are all constantly a-field?”

“I will tell you why;” whispered the old man, glancing upwards to the clear blue sky, and then gazing round him, deep, deep, as he could look, as though he sought to pierce the earth at his feet; “Because the danger that we dread is at times invisible.—Listen!”

There was no necessity to enjoin attention, for every eye and every ear was open to his tidings; but a slight movement took place among the group, as they simultaneously advanced a step nearer to the mysterious-looking hunter.

“This very morning;” he pursued, lowering his voice, as though he would fain have prevented its escape beyond the circle of his listeners; “the dawn was just breaking in the east—”

“Aye, it was just at dawn that I saw the serpent;” interposed Ladislaus.

“Pshaw!” muttered the old man; and then without paying further attention to the interruption, he continued: “At dawn this morning I wakened as is my wont with the coming light; and I was drowsily watching the vapours as they rolled away

from the mountain-tops, when my narrow casement was suddenly darkened ; and as I raised myself upon my mattress to learn the cause of the occurrence, I saw that a huge body had interposed itself between me and the light. I stole stealthily to the window ; and there, writhing and wriggling in its own filthy slime, I saw——”

“ What ? tell us what ! ” exclaimed half a dozen voices.

“ A monstrous reptile—” pursued the old man ; “ of the shape and colour of the trunk of a forest oak, but longer than the loftiest cypress ; in short, an earth-worm, such as they say that these things may have been before the world was destroyed by water ; round, smooth, with a nauseous moisture that left its trail upon the earth ; and perpetually elongating and collapsing—now lying in the dust like a lopped tree shorn of its branches—and then again swelled out, ring touching upon ring, like a gigantic wine-cask with its encircling hoops—at intervals rearing its eyeless and shapeless head half a dozen feet from the earth ; and then again recommencing its loathsome and frightful movements prone in the dust. I watched it narrowly ; and

once, as it lifted itself up, its hateful outline again filled my casement. Every instant did I expect that the detested shape would force itself through the open space, and enter the hut ; when suddenly it darted down, and seeming as though it wore a pointed spear in its mouth, made an opening in the earth, through which it instantly disappeared. I have seen many frightful monsters in my time ;" said the hoary hunter in conclusion ; " but anything so hideous and so loathsome as that giant worm I never before beheld !"

" And what followed ?" asked a stout woodsman, wiping the clammy drops from his forehead.

" Nothing ;" replied Gabor ; " and surely this was enough. We now know the fate of all the friends and children whom we have lost. Any endeavour to discover the haunt of this man-eating worm is idle ; for it may descend through the earth on one side of the mountain, and re-appear upon the other. Go and pray—for you have no other hope."

As he spoke, the old man lifted his cap reverently from his wrinkled brow, and turned away ; while the listening peasants slowly and silently dispersed,

no individual among them permitting himself to doubt for an instant the most minute detail of the hunter's report.

From that day forth all agricultural and forest labour was at an end along the mountain range towards Moravia, for each dreaded to be the next victim ; and consequently want and despair were beginning to add their horrors to those under which the unfortunate peasants already laboured.

Just at this period, Charles Robert, who was anxious to cement the friendly relations which he had recently concluded with Poland and Bohemia, left Buda for the frontiers of those countries, being desirous to ascertain from personal observation what facilities of communication might be effected with each ; and he arrived at the fortress of Trenschin, pretexting as the cause of his visit his desire to investigate the state of the province, and to alleviate in so far as he was enabled to do so, the wants and sufferings of the population ; tardy as they had been in submitting to his authority.

His arrival was no sooner ascertained than every one hastened to the citadel to do him homage. The haughty noble and the sturdy peasant were alike

eager to be foremost in their demonstrations of loyalty, for the Neapolitan well knew the art of attaching gentle and simple by his condescension, kindness, and liberality ; and thus all who were beyond the influence of his libertine court, were strongly biassed in his favour.

As a natural consequence, the inquiries of the King relatively to the actual state of the province, immediately elicited an account of the fearful ravages of the mysterious animal or spirit which was deluging the neighbourhood with blood ; and although Charles Robert could not suppress a smile at the wild and impossible tales to which he was compelled patiently to listen, he nevertheless felt that the evil, from whatever cause it might arise, was one which must be terminated with all practicable speed ; and he accordingly issued a proclamation that whomsoever should deliver the country from the scourge which now trammelled its industry, and endangered the lives and safety of the inhabitants, should be richly and honourably rewarded.

It is almost needless to remark that the hope of gold, added to the original desire to secure self-

preservation by the destruction of the monster, be it what it might, and the consciousness that the bold exploit would be known to the King himself ; instigated many needy individuals who had hitherto shrunk from the danger, to endeavour to dare the adventure ; but it availed nothing to the affrighted peasantry that these voluntary champions sallied forth to brave their fate ; for few of them returned, and those few had discovered no traces of the common enemy.

The lamentation grew louder and deeper from day to day ; and the misery of the wretched population reached its acme when it was discovered that the mysterious Destroyer had ceased to glut its appetite with cattle, and now subsisted entirely upon human flesh ; having actually more than once carried off the aged and infirm from the huts in which they had been left for safety, when the stronger and hardier members of the little households had gone forth in search of food.

Resolute to terminate this state of suffering, should it be practicable, ere he left the province, and believing that an increase of perseverance might accomplish so desirable an end, Charles

Robert published a second edict, in which he declared that whomsoever should overcome the monster, should be endowed, he, and his heirs for ever, with all the extent of country visible from the spot on which he might slay it; and this was no sooner made known, than adventurers, eager to secure such an inheritance, flocked from all quarters to Trenschin, and for a time made the town and fortress ring with the tramp of horses and the clash of steel.

But, alas! though the bribe was greater, the result was still the same; and the unhappy province appeared to be irremediably abandoned to destruction.

All the male population of the immediate district capable of bearing arms, had been assembled by command of the Count Matthias when he made his last abortive stand against the Neapolitan King; but when fortune deserted him, his army dispersed; and those who succeeded in saving their lives by flight, returned to their mountain-homes, whence they had been torn by their feudal lord. Many, however, were so dangerously wounded, that their only hope of escaping captivity was by

concealing themselves as best they might in the caverns of the mountains ; and among these was a brave young herdsman named Bentze, who after fighting so gallantly as to attract the attention, and compel the admiration of Matthias himself, was ultimately overpowered ; and fell upon a heap of slain, to all appearance as dead as the pale corses on whom he rested.

It was not so, however ; and the dews of evening no sooner bathed his ensanguined brow, than returning sensation overwhelmed him for a time with keen and bitter agony ; his temples throbbed almost to bursting ; his veins seemed to run fire ; his stiffened limbs refused to obey the bidding of his will ; and an intense and cruel thirst devoured him so entirely that he could not articulate a groan. But after a time the cool fresh wind, the moist exhalations, and the deep stillness of the night, rendered his sufferings more endurable ; and he began to recal the struggle of the previous day, and to understand his situation sufficiently to feel that his only chance of retaining his freedom would be to secure a temporary hiding-place.

To Bentze this was an easy task ; for he had been

familiar from his boyhood with the recesses of the mountain-range ; and having ascertained that he was alone and unobserved, he made a strong effort, and crawled in the direction of a deep ravine, where he well knew that a clear stream, issuing from the heart of the rock, poured itself noiselessly across the mouth of a cave, not an arrow's flight from the border of the forest.

He reached his haven in safety ; and having contrived to subsist upon roots and berries until his wounds were sufficiently healed to admit of his using greater exertion, he ultimately made his way back to the mountain-village ; worn and languid it is true, but still the same brave and high-hearted youth who had been torn from the arms of his aged and helpless parents, at the command of his Suzerain. Great was his joy when he folded them once more to his bosom ; but even as he did so, another name trembled upon his lips—it was the name of Belitza, of his affianced bride, to whom he would have been already wedded had he not been called from her side to bear arms in the cause of Matthias.

It was with a bounding pulse that he learned

she was well, and true to him, even although tidings of his death in the fight had been brought to her by such of his comrades as had reached the hamlet; but his joy was tempered by the recollection that he returned to his mountain-home a beggar, having nothing to offer to her save a loving heart; and by the sad conviction that he must labour for a time, early and late, even to secure to her the comfort of a roof. He was young, however, and youth seldom yields to despair; and thus when the kiss and the smile of Belitza had reconciled him to the delay, by convincing him that it would work no change in her affection, he submitted to his fate with less impatience; and revenged himself upon his destiny by passing with his fair young love every moment that he could steal from toil.

The happiest day spent by the lovers was the Saturday, for then from dawn till sunset their labour was lightened by the recollection that the golden glory should no sooner have faded from the heavens than the hour of the “Maiden’s Walk” (a privilege which even the most stern of feudatories could not legally refuse to his vassals), was come; and they were free to wander at will until the morrow.

Wholly absorbed by the desire of obtaining the favourable notice of his lord by his activity and zeal, and thus shortening the period of probation to which his affection was condemned, Bentze had little heeded the proclamation of the King; which had the less excited his attention that the ravages of the invisible enemy were no longer committed in that immediate neighbourhood, although rumours of their continuance higher in the mountains constantly reached the village.

It chanced that on one occasion, after their weekly ramble, the young herdsman had lingered to a late hour in the cottage of Belitza. He had been endeavouring to convince the father of the maiden that their immediate union would conduce to their ultimate prosperity; but the old forester thought differently, for he had himself tried the experiment, and found it fail. He nevertheless so loved the suitor of his child, that he had refused his consent to the imprudent proposition with sufficient gentleness to persuade Bentze, that perseverance alone was wanting to induce a change in his resolution; and thus the lover did persevere until the hour had grown too late to enable him further to press his

suit that night; and after a parting salutation to the old couple, he proceeded to the door of the cottage, accompanied by Belitza; and there they lingered for a few moments to say those few last words so dear to lovers.

It was a glorious summer night. The moon rode so high, and the sky was so cloudless, that Bentze could distinguish the sweet smile of his beautiful mistress, and the gleam of her snowy teeth as the rich lips parted to give utterance to her "good night;" when suddenly she uttered a short shrill cry, and as it rang out upon the night air, the startled and bewildered herdsman saw two huge balls of fire flash for an instant, as a heavy body sprang past him with the rapidity of thought, and flinging itself upon the maiden with a roar like thunder, lifted her from the earth, and with equal speed retreated towards the forest with its prey.

For one brief instant Bentze stood stiffened by horror into the immobility of stone: but this passive terror was only momentary: in the next he drew from his girdle the axe which he always carried, and hurled it after the ravenous animal with a yell that aroused the whole hamlet. Bentze waited

not to ascertain if he might hope for help—his young, and pure, and lovely mistress was in the fangs of a wild animal; and he bounded after it, shouting aloud, and approaching nearer and nearer, as the increasing weakness of the wounded savage whom he had struck with his sharp weapon began to render it less able to preserve its speed, burdened as it was with the body of the insensible Belitza.
As he continued his pursuit, the young herdsman struck his foot violently against some object that lay upon his path; and by the moonlight he at once saw that it was his trusty axe, from which his enemy had freed itself in its flight. He raised it with an upward glance that spoke all his heart's gratitude; and grasping it tightly, struck with all his force into the flank of the brute, which had begun to lag through pain and loss of blood, and had moreover been baffled in an attempt to force a passage through the dense underwood that fringed the forest.

With a second roar, more hideous than the first, the savage brute flung down its prey, and turned fiercely upon its aggressor. The earth seemed to

shake beneath its feet ; and in that dim and mystic light its form took the proportions of some gigantic denizen of a former world, for which this lesser globe looked all too small. The combat was deadly ; man and beast rolled in the dust together ; and already the brave Bentze began to despair, when as the infuriated animal opened his huge and charnel-looking jaws to rend him, he suddenly struck full into its throat with the whole force of his iron arm ; and then plunging his hand amid the gushing blood that followed the blow, grasped its ensanguined tongue with a clutch on which hung his life. Tearing it forcibly towards him, the agony of the operation drove the brute to phrenzy ; and one blow of its tail not only compelled Bentze to loose his hold, but threw him off with such violence that he fell upon the earth several paces distant.

Its fate was, however, sealed. Unable to draw its breath without acute agony, gashed on every side by the axe, and sinking from loss of blood, the over-matched savage howled once or twice with a violence that penetrated the forest-depths ; and then with one long savage yell, rolled over upon its

side, quivered for an instant in every nerve, and expired.

For a few moments all was hushed and still ; between the senseless bodies of the lovers lay the carcase of the enormous beast, and above them rode the moon, shedding a soft and silvery light upon the scene of blood. But Bentze, although torn and mangled by the fangs of the savage animal that he had worsted, was not long ere he recovered from the stunning effects of his heavy fall ; and with some difficulty he contrived to drag himself to the spot where lay his pale and unconscious mistress, her long hair and her snowy kerchief dabbled with blood.

The poor herdsman still possessed strength enough to fold his arms about what he believed to be the dead body of his betrothed ; but when he would have raised her from the earth, his brain grew dizzy, a faint sickness fell upon his heart, and obscured his sight, and he relapsed into insensibility, still clutching the slight form of his beloved Belitza.

Thus were they found at dawn ; for during the darkness none of the villagers had dared to follow up the chase ; and within a few paces of them lay

an enormous lion, with the axe of Bentze still wedged deep in the bone of its upper jaw. The lovers were carefully conveyed to the hamlet; and a team of horses dispatched to the border of the forest, to drag thither the carcase of the huge savage which had so long and so lately been the terror of the whole province.

The most active and tender care was lavished upon the brave herdsman and his lovely and gentle mistress; nor was it long ere they revived to life and hope, although several weeks elapsed before they recovered from the injuries inflicted on them by the fury of their savage enemy. Their ills were, however, merely physical, for the King nobly redeemed his word; and Bentze at once found himself a wealthy man, free to wed when he listed, without let or hindrance from parent or kinsman; and he had no sooner secured his pretty bride, than he occupied himself in erecting on the summit of the rock at whose base he had destroyed the formidable brute which had become the founder of his fortunes, a stately fortress, which he named the Castle of the Lion-Stone; and where his descendants long preserved, as a trophy of the prowess of

their ancestor, the skin of the frightful monster from which it took its title.

The last Lord of Lion-Stone died near the close of the sixteenth century; but the race endured sufficiently long to earn for themselves a worthy page in the traditional records of their country.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Student's tale was told ; and the usual comments having been made upon it, the gentlemen of the party digressed into a long and animated discussion on the sports of the field, and the perils and pleasures of the chase. Nor was the conversation rendered less interesting by the intelligence which was brought to them during its progress, that the thaw had become so decided since sunset, as to have already removed every rational doubt of its continuance. Nevertheless, no bustle was created by the news; for the premature arrangements made on the false alarm some days previously having been carried out, and suffered to continue in full force, little remained to be done ; and it was consequently not only without reluctance, but with avidity, that all yielded to the suggestion of the host that this, their last evening together, should be employed like those by which it had been preceded ; and that a concluding legend should be related which might terminate the night.

"I vote ;" said the Count Pálffy ; "that we wind up our labours with a tradition of the fall of Turkish power. Can no one present give us a history of the overthrow of the Crescent, and the restoration of the Cross in Hungary ? Do not let us, even in retrospective story, leave the Moslem lording it over our beautiful Buda ! By Saint Stephen, I would rather rake up some old-world history myself, than suffer that such foul wrong should be done ; for although we were indeed conquered for a time, we were at length nobly revenged."

"You are committed, my good Count Nicholas ;" said the host ; "Your patriotism has placed you at our mercy ; and we will withhold it, if it be only to test the sincerity of your indignation."

"I will put in no petition :" laughed Pálffy ; "although I confess that I did not anticipate the extreme rigour of the law with which you seem disposed to visit me. This is no moment to refuse anything to such a circle ; for who shall say if it may ever again be formed without one broken link ?"

"It is best for us all that we are unable to answer questions such as those, when they arise within

our hearts unbidden :" remarked the Lady of Revay in a low sad voice. " Could we foresee the future, how few of us would walk the world in a bridal dress—We should be wrapped in pall ; hopeless and aimless !"

" Nay, nay ; my good cousin, I must forbid all such morbid topics of discourse :" interposed the host : " Remember that we part to-morrow ; let it be with sunshine upon our spirits."

" The Saints grant it !" murmured the gentle matron, as she again bowed her head over her tapestry-frame.

" And now, Pálffy, for your tale ;" said the host.
" Are you prepared ?"

Before the question could be answered, the light-hearted young Count had to conclude a whisper that he was busily conveying into the ear of the Countess Adèle, for which he was rewarded with a smile and a blush : these gained, he replied only by a gesture of assent ; and without further delay told the tradition of

THE RENEGADE.

In a small and obscure village of the Canton of Berne, in Switzerland, about the middle of the

seventeenth century, lived two youths united in the closest bonds of friendship ; and demonstrating by the earnest and uninterrupted affection that subsisted between them, and with which no difference of habits or of prospects was ever permitted to interfere, the utter fallacy of the narrow-minded theory that no sincere attachment can ever exist save where the parties are in a position of worldly equality.

That such is unfortunately too often proved to be the case, will admit of no denial, for gold and power are alike rigorous assayers of the human heart ; but it is not the less certain that where it will stand the test, the affection thus tried must be the deepest and the least susceptible of change. Little can that friendship be relied upon which has been warmed into life by sunshine, and fed only upon rose leaves ; for every passing cloud may suffice to chill and destroy it. To be a holy and a trustful thing, it must have endured the changes of fortune, and been subjected to the vicissitudes of the world. It must have grown amid tears as well as smiles ; have known grief as well as joy ; and struggled no less than shared ; for who will deny that it has been

the hours of suffering and sorrow which have *proved* the friend? and that it is ever those which stand out the brightest and the most precious on the canvass of the heart's memories?

Although widely opposed in rank, the mutual affection of the two young Switzers had levelled every distinction, and each saw in the other only the brother of his adoption. They were too guileless and too pure-hearted to give a thought to those worldly barriers which their mutual love had overleaped; and as the present was all in all to them, no thought of a future which might separate them for ever, threw a shadow over their happiness.

Oliver, who was a few months the senior in age, was the only child of an officer of rank; who, after shedding his best blood in the battles of his country, and earning a name as honourable as long and worthy services could bestow, had retired to his native province to pass his few remaining years in dignified retirement; occupied only by the memories of the glorious past, and the education of his son, whom he designed for his own profession, when he should have become capable of bearing arms.

Coigny, on the contrary, was the younger of a large family; and his parents were poor cotters, whose means of subsistence centered in a small flock of goats, which were confided to his care, while the elder children were employed in more laborious avocations.

Reared in upright and honest principles, the little goat-herd dearly loved his humble relatives, and particularly his mother, whose gentleness made her a refuge on every occasion of difficulty or disgrace; while blent with his respect for his father, there was a terror which grew out of the stern and uncompromising severity of his nature; for the hardy mountaineer, whose whole life had been one long struggle with poverty and toil, had no sympathy with the waywardness and errors of the young, involving as they did the loss of both time and profit; but visited them with a stern displeasure, which made the idea of his anger terrible to all who were dependent on him.

Nature had endowed Coigny with an earnest mind and a vivid imagination. The very child of the elements, there was no less enjoyment to him in the sublime coil of the tempest, than in the

luxurious calm of the sunshine. Inexhaustible in his search after the wild and the magnificent, he emulated his flock in their adventurous feats among the rugged and difficult rocks ; and like the chamois, he sprang from ridge to ridge wherever there was a resting-place for his foot, heedless of the boiling and bounding torrent that thundered through the gulph beneath him, and the frowning masses that hung darkly above his head.

And there he shouted in his bold freedom to the clouds, as they spread their fleecy canopies over the blue vault of heaven, and sailed along before the wind ; or scared the wild birds from their hiding-places in the rocks, and then brought them down with his unerring arrows, as they flew shrieking past him. He heeded neither danger nor fatigue when he was on the mountain top ; but at times he would stand there, and gaze upon the vapours that folded themselves like a stately mantle about the giant crest of Mont Blanc, until dreams that were nature's own poetry, crossed the sublimity of his solitude ; and strange yearnings to which he could give neither voice nor name, spoke of a bold and ambitious spirit within him, ill-suited to a peasant's son.

Had his early lot been drudgery in the valley, it is possible that this mood of mind might never have been awakened, or would not have endured; but the half wild and unfettered wanderings which his charge imposed upon him, nurtured the incipient passion; and unconsciously to himself, Coigny's characteristics were developing themselves in a manner which could not fail to exercise an all-powerful influence over his future fate.

As his strength and self-reliance became more assured, there were moments when he could no longer endure even the partial restraint of his flock; and that, bribing some fellow goat-herd to add them to his own charge during his temporary absence, with a portion of his scanty meal, he bounded away into the far and mysterious region which shut in his native valley, and penetrated into solitudes hitherto untrodden by human foot.

A restless and nameless feeling was grappling at his heart. He would fling himself down in some desart place, and gazing up at the stern outline of the mountain-chain, marvel whether the world which lay beyond it were one of labour and monotony, like that which he himself inhabited; while

strange vague thoughts, making dim shadows pass before him, would heave his heart almost to bursting, until the memory of his friend broke through the mental mist; and then he suddenly rose up, and shaking off the mystic vision, sought for some bright plant or sparkling mineral to carry home to him as a relique of his truancy; and Oliver, whose tastes were less enthusiastic, though his heart was as warm as that of the young peasant, ever received the gift with gratitude and delight; and loved to listen to the venturous feats and wild imaginings of his companion, which made the calm of their actual life look to him only the more happy; little dreaming that they did but shadow forth the extraordinary vicissitudes of his future destiny.

Things were in this state, and the youths had attained their fourteenth year, when on one occasion Coigny having, according to his custom, entrusted the charge of his flock to a fellow herdsman, and lingered in his favourite haunts until the sunset by wreathing the crest of the western mountains with circlets of jewels, reminded him that he must hasten to his cottage-home, or incur the displeasure of his father, discovered to his dismay when he reclaimed

his charge, that a goat was missing from the number which he had led forth.

For a time he could not give credence to his misfortune ; and as the dull boor who should have watched them could give him no clue to guide his search for the lost animal, he spent an hour in seeking for it in every direction. Great was his terror while that weary hour wore on ; but when at its termination he once more found himself standing amid his diminished flock, without a hope of reclaiming the fugitive, despair seized upon his heart.

He thought of his father's anger, of his brother's terror, and of his mother's tears ; and he trembled as he stood in the soft and delicious gloaming, and pictured to himself the welcome which awaited him.

Suddenly a thousand of his vague and vapoury dreams seemed to take form and substance ; and his tears were dried, and his heart leapt, as he remembered that the narrow valley wherein he stood was not a world ; and that there must be space for thought and action beyond the rocky barrier by which his view had been hitherto bounded.

"No, no ;" he exclaimed exultingly ; "it cannot be that this most gorgeous earth was made only for me, and such as me ! There must be some upon it who can better estimate its glory. Some who can dive in thought into the very heart of our monarch-mountain, and pluck thence its mysterious secret. Men of a finer mould, who do not pass their days in tending flocks upon the heights, or guiding the plough through the furrows. And I must to them—must mingle with them, and share their fate, while I imbibe their knowledge. I dare not meet my father, and henceforward I have no home, save in the wide, wide world in which I am about to become a wanderer!"

His resolution once taken, Coigny had too much constitutional energy to waste time in vacillation or regret. Thoughts of his mother and his friend, memories of his fond brother and his gentle sisters, came upon him it is true, and a mist spread before his eyes, and a weight grew upon his heart ; but these did not divert him from his purpose. Collecting the remainder of his flock, and driving them before him a few yards on their homeward path, he then left them to complete their journey unintended ;

and turning suddenly away, struck into a road which led he knew not whither, save that it must increase the distance between himself and an exasperated father.

Great was the consternation in the valley-hamlet that night when the docile animals returned to their shed without their herdsman. The heart of the mother sank within her ; for with a true maternal instinct when she learnt from her elder son, who had hastened to house the flock, that one of the number was missing, her thoughts instantly pointed to the truth. The girls wept, and shouted aloud the name of their brother ; but they were answered only by the echoes of the hills, which seemed to mock them as they flung back the sounds of their clear young voices, and made the valley ring with their anxious cries.

The agony of the father was less demonstrative, but more energetic. Like the gnarled oak, rude and rigid, he refused to bend, but he was not proof against the shock of feeling ; and he spent the entire night, and a great portion of the following day, in earnest efforts to discover some traces of his lost child. He sought, however, in vain ; and many

were the painful hours passed by every member of the humble family ere time softened their regret, and the memory of Coigny became a theme on which they could dilate with calm, and speculate without deep and agonizing emotion.

Misanthropes and cynics may expatiate on the corruption of the human heart; and they may have only too much cause to do so; but it is a healthy and a blessed conviction that it is “not all evil;” but that there is ever one pulse of good to redeem the rest—one affection which has refused to become “of the earth, earthy,” and which throbs on in its own pure vocation, flinging from it the dirt and dross of the world, and asserting its affiance with higher and holier things—and thus it was with the rude Switzer.

He was a hard and a stern man, for poverty had been his handmaiden, and dependence his task-mistress; but cold as he seemed, he loved the little ones who looked to him for bread; and thus, when he learnt his bereavement, he left those who stood about his hearth, and “went forth to seek for the one that was lost;” nor did he, even when the search proved unavailing, forget the gay voice

which had echoed through the narrow hut, nor the light step that had made music upon the earthen floor.

There had been, moreover, a wild untameable energy about the boy, that had awakened the pride of the father's heart. He had never shrunk either from fatigue, solitude, or danger ; there was high promise about him, and now all was gone ! Gone, no one knew how, nor where—without a tear, without a blessing, without a pledge. Gone, in his youth, and in his helplessness, into the midst of a world which was made for the stout of arm, and the strong of nerve—for the man of wealth and the man of might—a world which has no sympathy for honest shame nor virtuous poverty, but which tricks out its favourites in folds of purple ; and arming them with a purse of gold and a sword of power, teaches them to pay or to hew their way to the eminence that they desire to attain, without one thought wasted on the withered hearts and crushed spirits with which the path is paved.

No one mourned the truant youth more deeply than Oliver. He had been so long accustomed to his fond companionship, that the days seemed to

have grown preternaturally wearisome when the glad voice and joyous eyes of Coigny came no more to gladden them ; and so sad and dispirited did he become, that his father, who never deemed that the loss of his playmate could thus have affected him, began to believe that the monotonous inaction of his present mode of existence was undermining his energies ; and he immediately resolved to rescue him from its effects by obtaining for him a commission in the Imperial army.

This was easily achieved, for the veteran had earned a right to crave a grace at the foot of the throne for which he had so often shed his blood ; and thus Oliver, a few months after the mysterious disappearance of his friend, found himself enrolled in the proud ranks of the gallant army which was preparing to resist the usurping aggressions of France.

Born of a brave father, whose sword had been alike his birthright and his heirdom ; and nursed amid scenes of danger and of strife, the lullaby of the infant Oliver had been the roll of the drum, or the blast of the trumpet ; his earliest toys the slender lance, and the good sword which defied his unequal

strength ; and thus, when he first buckled on his weapon, his swelling heart asserted itself ; and so bravely did he sustain his own honour and his father's reputation, that when Louis of Baden prepared, in 1686, to join the Christian army under Charles of Lorraine, and to assist at the recapture of the fortress and city of Buda, the metropolis of Hungary, which had been held for upwards of a century by the Moslem, Oliver accompanied him as major of his regiment.

It was indeed a glorious privilege, for Lorraine was steeped in victory to the very lips ! He had assisted to deliver Vienna from her enemies, and his progress since that event had been one continual triumph ; no wonder then that the spirit of the brave Oliver yearned to prove himself worthy of such a leader.

The opportunity was not long wanting, for on the eighteenth of June the Christian army sat down before Buda ; and commenced their preparations for the siege with so much zeal and alacrity, that on the thirteenth of July the gallant Prince already found himself in a position to venture the attack. All his courage and judgment were, how-

ever, alike necessary to the recapture of the desecrated fortress; for Kara Mustapha, the military commander, was a man of tried gallantry and great mental resources; while the Pasha of Buda himself was the celebrated Apdi Pasha, who to his tried fidelity and acknowledged valour owed the honourable station which he then held, as Governor of the fourth city in importance throughout the Turkish empire; and it was well known that he met any assault of his enemies with an energy and bravery equal to their own.

So uncertain, indeed, did the result of the siege at one time appear to Lorraine himself, that, after having consulted with his principal officers, and ascertained the extent of the loss to which he had been subjected by the failure of his first attempt to dislodge the Infidels, he decided on proposing a negociation, and on offering conditions of surrender to the Pasha. The demand for an armistice was accordingly made by the Imperial leader, and immediately conceded by the Moslem; together with a safe-conduct for any messenger who should be the bearer of dispatches from the Christian camp; and, so certified, General Count Königseck

was forthwith entrusted with a letter to Apdi Pasha, containing not only the proposed terms of surrender, but also the most splendid promises, in the event of his complying with the terms stipulated by Lorraine.

A temporary cessation of hostilities having silenced the guns of the fortress, the Imperialist General arrived unmolested at the outer gate ; but there, despite all his expostulations, he was compelled to remain while his credentials were forcibly taken from his hands, and himself left by the unceremonious Aga who had received him, with an injunction to remain quietly where he was for a few minutes, while the letter was read by the Pasha, and his answer prepared ; an order which he was most reluctantly compelled to obey, from possessing no power of resistance.

He was not detained long, however ; for he had scarcely succeeded in subduing to patience the indignant wrath with which he had seen himself subjected to the insolence of the Infidel Aga, when to his surprise he already saw him return with a letter in his hand, rolled in a scarf of red silk, the signal of hostility even to the death ; and with this

unsatisfactory reply Königseck galloped back to Lorraine's tent.

The missive of the Pasha was written in French, and evidently by his own hand, as the signature demonstrated: a fact which created no small astonishment among the Christian leaders; while its contents were brief, cold, and determined; and their tendency such as the blood-red envelope had already taught them to anticipate.

The business of the siege accordingly recommenced forthwith; both offensive and defensive measures multiplied on both sides; and each party felt that a single false step would prove irretrievable, so vigilant was the enemy, and so determined to put forth all his strength and skill.

The resources of the Pasha were immense. A formidable fortress strongly garrisoned; great store of ammunition and provisions; wells hewn in the living rock, whose waters could not fail; and troops whose leading characteristic was hatred of the Christians: and all these advantages were backed by the favour of the Sultan, who had the most entire confidence in his truth and skill, and who left him free to act as he should deem most expedient in every emergency.

Charles of Lorraine, on the other hand, was at the head of a noble army, of which a considerable portion were native Hungarians, burning to revenge the wrongs of their father-land upon the Infidel enemies who had drained their country of her best and bravest blood ; he had the *prestige* of victory to ensure the confidence of his men ; and he knew that the eyes of all Europe would be turned upon the leader who should drive the Moslem from his stronghold in Christendom. He had, moreover, the high road to Vienna clear behind him, whence he could always summon more aid should he be compelled to seek it ; while there could be no want of subsistence in a camp pitched upon Hungarian soil for the deliverance of her sons from a bondage worse than death.

The siege was thus proceeding with vigour on both sides, when a rumour reached Buda that the Grand Vēsir was marching to the assistance of Apdi Pasha with an army of a hundred thousand men ; a report which spread consternation among the Christian troops, while it relieved all the apprehensions of the besieged garrison ; and even promised the total annihilation of the Imperialist army.

Their haughty hopes were not, however, destined to be realized ; for the Christian generals, resolved at any sacrifice to prevent the junction of these two formidable leaders, attacked the Vēsir's forces between Turbal and Tétény, when he was comparatively unprepared for the encounter ; and so desperately did they fall upon the Infidels, that despite their gigantic numbers they were ultimately compelled to fly, making the very confusion consequent on the defeat of such a host, one great engine of its destruction.

With the repulse of the Vēsir's army, all hope from without terminated for the beleagured fortress ; but this fact, even coupled as it was with the disastrous fate of his friends, failed to bend the spirit or to shake the resolution of Apdi Pasha. Night and day he was upon the walls, ordering, directing, and in many cases labouring, with his own hands ; for in nothing did he partake of the supineness or indecision of his countrymen ; and in all his exertions he was ably seconded by his general, Kara Mustapha, a man of gigantic mould and powerful muscle, whose hatred of the Giaour made him on this occasion even more formidable than usual ;

while with his physical courage he united such sound judgment and unerring sagacity, that Apdi Pasha could scarcely have been better seconded.

Rendered frantic by the discomfiture of their expected allies, and resolved to sell the fortress at a price which would almost make the Christians rue its recovery, the two commanders redoubled their efforts to destroy their assailants; and with such cruel policy did they carry out their resolution, that thousands of the Imperialists were blown into the air by the springing of the various mines with which the besieged had intersected the outworks; as well as cut off by the furious sallies which they occasionally made.

The Christians, meanwhile, were not idle. A bomb, thrown into the citadel by Lorraine's artillery, fired the powder-magazine, and entirely destroyed the magnificent palace built by Matthias Corvinus; and at that frightful moment, even the bold heart of Kara Mustapha gave way for an instant, as he found his leader and himself suddenly standing amid a heap of dust and ruin, surrounded by the maimed and bleeding victims of the explosion, and covered with blackened fragments of the

dismantled buildings. “Now Allah save us!” he ejaculated in dismay; “for we have no other hope.”

“Peace, trembler!” said Apdi Pasha sternly; “Where do you read that coward lesson? If it be in your own heart, close the foul record with your dagger, that no other eye may light upon it! None is ever beyond hope so long as he is true to himself. Are we not men and Moslems? And shall we fail because fire has ignited powder, and that proud Buda reckons one palace the less?”

Bowed by the rebuke, Kara Mustapha ventured no reply; while the Pasha stalked away, forcing for himself a path among the cumbered and smoking ruins as calmly as though he had been obeying a summons to the Divan.

Not a moment was lost; the wounded were collected, and placed under the charge of the proper officers; parties of soldiers cleared the thoroughfares of the rubbish with which the explosion had choked them up; the dead were carried away to burial; and having seen that every precaution had been taken to diminish as much as possible the advantages likely to accrue to the besiegers from this unfortunate casualty; and feeling compelled to admit

to himself that the position of the garrison had now become desperate, the brave and energetic Pasha resolved at least to secure, should this yet be possible, the treasure which was accumulated within the fortress; and accordingly, having caused it to be collected in one of the vaults communicating with the Danube, he contrived, under cover of the darkness of midnight, to freight a number of the heavy flat-bottomed barges, which were at that period the only craft on the river, and to dispatch them, laden with all that was most precious in his possession, under the charge of some trusty officers, as his final act of fealty to the Sultan his master; intending that they should descend the stream to the Black Sea, and thence enter the Bosphorus.

But his intention was frustrated; for the weight of their lading rendered the barges so unwieldy and unmanageable, that dawn surprised them ere they had passed the foot of the Blocksberg, which rears its majestic head a short space beyond the fortress, and they were all sunk by the cannon of the Christians; while with them perished the last hope of Apdi Pasha.

Despair, however, only rendered him more des-

perate—the garrison had now little left to defend, save their lives and their honour; and he resolved rather to sacrifice all the first than to peril even the shadow of the other. The strife consequently progressed without cessation or abatement; although the besieged had never recovered from the shock of the explosion which had swept away so large a portion of their strength.

Where they had counted their fighting-men by thousands they now numbered them by hundreds; and Apdi Pasha was conscious that the day was not far distant when he should be compelled to reckon them only by scores and tens. On the last week in August his quick eye detected several breaches in the outworks, which he no longer possessed hands to repair; but the firmness which was rapidly failing the walls of Buda seemed to have transferred itself in like proportion to his iron nature, for he never wore a shadow on his brow, nor looked as though he did not still deem his power resistless against the Christians.

One yawning chasm on the riverward side of the fortress, appeared meanwhile to the besiegers to be of such unquestionable promise, that a council of

war was held on the first day of September, when it was unanimously agreed that on the morrow the Imperialists should endeavour to take the fortress by assault; a previous opportunity being offered to the Pasha to prevent the unnecessary effusion of blood, by pointing out to him the powerless condition of his defences, and once more calling upon him to surrender.

This point conceded, the assembly next turned to a consideration of the proper individual to be entrusted with a mission of such surpassing importance. The Infidels were no longer in a position to refuse ingress to the Christian envoy, be he whom he might; and therefore the chivalrous courtesy of Lorraine taught him at once to feel that the person selected must be of sufficient rank to prevent his contact with the Pasha from appearing matter of insult; that he should have a perfect knowledge of the French language, as the letter of the Moslem leader, lately received, proved his acquaintance with that dialect, which was probably the only European tongue with which he was familiar; and that he must also be quick of observation, courtly in manner, and unfailingly self-possessed; capable of refuting

an unwelcome argument, and equally able to advance a desirable proposition; for as the Prince had resolved not again to flatter the haughty arrogance of the Pasha by putting pen to paper, all the success of the negociation would necessarily depend on the discretion and judgment of the Ambassador.

Several officers of rank and character were pointed out by the different leaders, as eligible for the trust; and among the rest, Prince Louis of Baden named his protégé and friend, Oliver, whom he declared to be, according to his own judgment, the very individual suited to such a service.

"For his gallantry and good faith;" said the generous Prince; "I will myself be warrant; as well as for his chivalry as a knight, and his courtesy as a gentleman. I would as soon put trust in Major Oliver as in my own brother."

"Enough;" replied Lorraine; "we thank you heartily for such an envoy; and need waste no more words. Let the gallant officer be told that our election has fallen upon him, and that we have perfect confidence that he will do honour to our trust."

This was indeed a moment of triumph to the brave soldier. Elated by the confidence of his General, and fully impressed with the importance of the mission entrusted to him, he lost no time in preparation; and within an hour he entered the tent of Lorraine to receive his instructions, having nothing further to do than to obey such orders as he might receive.

"Major Oliver;" said the Duke, when he had carefully recapitulated to his attentive companion every detail of his mission; "You have come under my notice with high promise; and a princely word is pledged to your deserts; but you are, as I understand, brave even to rashness; and it is possible that you may conceive it more likely to advance your reputation should the Infidels hold out, and refuse the grace which we now offer them, as well in mercy to themselves as in the hope of saving the lives of our own gallant followers, than should you succeed in inducing them to hear reason. If I have judged rightly, I pray you to disabuse yourself of so dangerous an error. There is no honour to be won by the butchery of an unequal enemy; and such must this unhappy contest prove, should the gallant but hot-headed

Pasha persist in his hopeless obstinacy. There are a thousand memories connected with Buda which are dear to the Magyars; and I would fain not reduce the fair city to a shambles while there be even the most faint hope of an alternative. To such an one as I have been taught to consider Major Oliver, I have now said enough. Farewell, Sir; and remember that you have the ducal word of Charles of Lorraine that he will never lose sight of your fortunes, should you on this occasion prove true to your trust and to yourself."

As the Prince spoke, he bent his head gravely but kindly to the Envoy, and lifting a paper from the table, walked towards the inner enclosure of his tent; while Oliver, after a profound obeisance, and with a heart big with emotion, sprang upon his horse, which his attendant held ready for his departure, and without exchanging a word with any whom he met, galloped out of the camp, followed by an inferior officer and an interpreter—a precaution necessary in the event of the Pasha deputing his military ally Kara Mustapha, who was unacquainted with any European language, to receive the Christian Envoy.

A few slight and evidently insincere objections were made by the Moslem guard, to acquaint the Pasha with the arrival of the three Imperialists, and their request for permission to pass into his presence; but they were ultimately informed that His Highness was prepared to learn their errand, be it what it might; and that he would himself receive them at the close of the Divan.

They were accordingly conducted to a lateral apartment, opening upon the principal hall of the building, whither, on the destruction of the Corvinian palace, Apdi Pasha had removed with his attendants; and there the courtesies of reception were carefully but silently observed. Crystal goblets of water, and the costly sweetmeats of the East, were handed round; and then each guest was presented with a chibouque, in order that he might smoke away his impatience.

Oliver was prepared, however, to submit without comment or expostulation to every caprice of the Infidels, so long as they did not affect the honour of his cause; and even had he been possessed of less philosophy, he would not on this occasion have been called upon to exert any very severe self-dis-

cipline ; for half an hour had scarcely elapsed, when an Aga, richly attired, and laden with jewelled weapons, appeared to conduct him to the presence of the Pasha.

The Christian officer and his attendants immediately rose, and followed their gorgeous guide across the great hall, to an apartment, or rather saloon of noble dimensions, whose high and arched casement opened upon the Danube ; and assuredly no one of the trio had been prepared for the splendid spectacle which awaited them, as the heavy doors were flung back by a couple of mutes, clad in sumptuous habits of cachemire and cloth of gold.

On a divan of purple velvet sprinkled with silver stars, which occupied three sides of the vast room, sat Apdi Pasha, carefully placed in the right hand corner of the couch ; and about him stood a dozen of his principal officers, among whom the most conspicuous, both from his massive form and magnificent dress, was Kara Mustapha. Two lines of eunuchs stretched away to the right and left of the apartment ; and grouped together at the lower end of the floor stood a troop of *almè*, or dancing-girls,

in graceful attitudes, as though they had just alighted on earth, and were once more prepared to take wing.

But these incongruous assistants at a question of life and death had been evidently only intended as a feature of the magnificence by which it had been the pleasure of the Pasha to surprise the Christian Envoy ; for as Oliver and his attendants crossed the threshold, a signal from the Turkish leader caused their instant disappearance ; and had the three Imperialists had time or thought to bestow upon such a subject, so suddenly did the whole group vanish, that they might have been tempted to believe that they had been the sport of their own excited senses.

The ceremonies of reception were soon performed ; and then the Envoy raised his eyes, not without considerable curiosity, to the countenance of the renowned and valiant Apdi Pasha ; but as he did so, he met the full gaze of the Turk himself, and was surprised to see a sudden and powerful emotion convulse his features for an instant. The feeling by which it was produced, however, soon passed away ; and he relapsed into the stern and haughty

gravity for which, even Moslem as he was, he was remarkable.

“ Speak, Christian ;” he said in his own tongue, after the pause of a moment, during which Oliver had glanced over the group of armed and silent Beys and Agas who composed his court : “ We are met for council. Speak—I listen.”

“ I am dispatched to your Highness ;” commenced the Envoy in French ; but a waive of the hand, impatiently performed by the Pasha, cut short his address, as he said coldly, and still in Turkish : “ The servant of the Padishah (may his reign flourish !) will hear the Christian through his interpreter.”

Oliver bowed obedience ; and the dragoman, having placed himself in a kneeling position at the edge of the Pasha’s carpet, forthwith entered upon his task.

The address of the Imperialist officer was eloquent, for it was earnest ; and a deep respect for the brave enemy with whom he had been sent to treat, taught him so to measure his expressions that no pang of mortification should be added to the consciousness of diminished power. He placed

lucidly before him the ruined state of the city walls, the weakness of his surviving garrison, and the certain defeat which must follow continued resistance; and then he painted in glowing colours the happiness which must accrue to both leaders, from the consciousness that they had forborne needlessly to waste human life, and to raise against themselves the cry of blood. Nor did he fail to assure the haughty Moslem, that respect for his high personal qualities, and those of his principal General, had no inconsiderable share in the resolution of Lorraine to take the extreme measure, in which he had been made the unworthy representative of that Prince's expostulations and proposals.

"We waste time ;" said the Pasha indignantly ; " Is my face blackened, that the Christian comes to ask me to put my beard into his hand, while the pulses of my heart yet throb ? Am I not the Pasha of Buda, and the shadow of the Padishah ? Our conference is ended. Among the Moslem, defeat does not make traitors."

Oliver, prepared for this first burst of dignified displeasure, and conscious that the moment was now come on which hung all the fortunes of his

mission, did not recede a step ; but calmly requesting once more to be heard, instructed his interpreter respectfully to ask from the courtesy of the Pasha a private interview, were it only of ten minutes' duration.

A scornful smile passed over every face among the Moslem, and each stroked down his beard in contemptuous pity of the Christian's audacity ; but their disdain was quickly converted into astonishment when Apdi Pasha, after a momentary pause, said quietly ; “ And why not ? if the Giaour persist in wasting his words ? Allah Kerim ! there is no reason why we should not indulge his weakness. Be it as he says ; we will be alone. Not even his own dragoman shall attend him, for that ceremony does but induce a greater consumption of time in a vain conference, and I will speak with him in a language with which he is familiar.”

“ Mashallah ! his face will be whitened by your condescension ;” murmured several of the bystanders ; “ But who shall say that he bears no arms ?”

“ I will venture the risk ;” said Apdi Pasha, as he rose from the divan, and thrust aside the cushions upon which he had been leaning ; “ I can

protect myself against a true man, and I should scorn to fear a traitor. Make way, Sirs ; we would pass out."

Not another remark was ventured ; and the Moslem leader left the hall, followed by Oliver, without further interference.

The apartment into which he led the way was of small dimensions ; and was not only sumptuously, but somewhat incongruously fitted up. In one corner lay piled the armour of the Pasha, near which were arranged his costly weapons and jewelled horse-gear ; several chibouques inlaid with turquoise, and other precious stones, were resting against the wall in the opposite angle of the room ; and on a table in the centre of the floor were heaped books and charts, and some rudely constructed scientific instruments, which, however contemptible they might appear in our time, were rare and valued treasures in the seventeenth century ; and assuredly would not have been sought for in the cabinet of an Infidel.

The attendants by whom they had been admitted into the private apartment of the Pasha had no sooner retired and closed the door behind them,

than to the astonishment of Oliver, the haughty Moslem flung himself upon his neck, exclaiming ; “ My friend ! my dear, but never forgotten friend ! Do we indeed meet again on this earth ? Is it not a false and lying dream ? Or do I really once more clasp the loved companion of my childhood to my heart ? ”

In an instant the truth flashed upon the amazed Christian ; the tone of that familiar voice ; the touch of that familiar hand : the past was annihilated as if by magic ; and the two Switzers folded each other in a close and clinging embrace, which seemed to knit their very souls together. Tears of strong and uncontrollable emotion rolled down the cheeks of both ; their youth was for the moment renewed ; and their mountain-home rose vividly before them. Again and again they gazed upon each other ; but at length, as the violence of their joy subsided into greater calm, the Pasha drew his friend towards the sofa, and they seated themselves side by side, with clasped hands, as though they feared to loose their hold, lest all should even then prove unreal.

It was a strange sight, at a period when the

Moslem and the Christian were at deadly feud throughout the land, to see those two high-hearted but faith-severed men, thus clinging to each other ; with an expression of unutterable affection beaming upon cheek and brow, and seeming to defy their varied fortunes. The turbaned head of the powerful Pasha was bowed down upon the flowing locks of his companion ; and the mustachioed lip of the Christian soldier was buried amid the bushy beard of his early playmate.

No strong emotion will endure for ever ; and although it was long ere the two friends recovered from the first transport of their delighted surprise at so unlooked-for a meeting, they ultimately began to experience a lively curiosity as to the early events of each other's worldly career ; and Oliver soon recapitulated the simple routine of courage and honour by which he had attained to his present rank in the Imperialist army. But when it became the Moslem's turn to tell his tale, the task was one of greater length and interest ; for the little goat-herd could not progress into the mighty Pasha, whose will was law, and whose frown was death, without having to recount a stirring and an

eventful story, of which every detail was precious to his friend.

A smile, half sorrow and half scorn, passed across the lip of Apdi Pasha, as he prepared to repay the confidence of Oliver. Could it be that a regret rose to his spirit as he sought to recal the squalid boyhood whose birthright was subjection and labour, and whose best enjoyment was a stolen and solitary hour of truancy? Could it be that "the leader of ten thousand" looked back with sadness to his scanty flock, and the days when he ruled over senseless animals instead of men?

Perchance it might be so; for at the period of boyish penury his heart was light, and his conscience had not spoken to his reason in that voice whose slightest whispers are as a thunder peal. Then, he could stand upon the rocky pinnacle, when the storm-cloud was sweeping across the sky, and vomiting forth its lightnings; and lift a fearless eye to the sublimely-troubled heavens, for the messenger of tempest could not write upon the whirling vapours "**RENEGADE AND APOSTATE!**" He had not yet forgotten his country and his GOD; he had not yet abjured his birthright and his faith; he had

not gambled away his soul, and sold his immortality for the base coin of worldly supremacy. He had then a home, a poor one, it is true ; but there were loving hearts at that narrow hearth ; and he had been the joy and the plaything of them all. Even the memory of his stern father was linked with some few fond passages ; for he had cherished him in sickness, pillow'd his aching head upon his sturdy breast, and held him kindly in his arms, although those arms were already wearied by a day of toil, when the ailments of his tender age had come upon him.

And then his mother ! No—not even in his proudest moments of triumph—not even in his softest hours of luxury, had he ever forgotten *her*. And there were times even now, when in his slumbers he dreamed that he was once more laid on her loving bosom, and rocked to rest by the murmurs of her sweet and gentle voice : and that he saw his pretty sisters standing near, and smiling upon him as he slept. But these soft visions seldom endured long ; the very violence of the emotion which they induced dissolved the spell, and he awoke with a start, to find that all was gone—*all*—

for what could his present position offer to compensate for his home-happiness? The prayer of his boyhood might indeed tremble upon his lips, but he dare no longer breathe it—the prayer which could have made the vision linger was his no longer!

The heart of the goat-herd Coigny, still beat under the jewelled vest of Apdi Pasha; he longed to be loved—and he was loved, but not as he had once been. Beauty was at his feet, and flattery in his ear; but he loathed the smiles that could be bought with gold, and the adulation that was born of fear.

Who shall say with what hours of bitter and unavailing regret the favoured servant of the Sultan expiated the sin of his greatness? Or how often the torn heart bled, when the brow was as hard and as stern as marble? No one had ever heard him sigh. He became cold, and haughty, and unimpressible; he had never known fear, and he had no sympathy with the failings of others. Relentless, even towards himself, his wrath was dangerous to all who provoked it; and his affections had been so early blighted, that he had no moments of moral

weakness of which an enemy could take advantage.

Such was Apdi Pasha, the Governor of Buda; a man great even in his sin; over whom the angels might have wept had he not denied his God! And as Oliver looked upon him, he felt the desire grow every moment more strong to raise from the dust into which he had fallen, the erring but noble companion of his boyhood.

This feeling shaped itself into words during a momentary pause which ensued at the termination of his own uneventful narrative; but an angry spot rose instantly to the cheek of his companion, and burnt there in the deepest crimson. It was long ere any one had dared to imply reproof to the powerful favourite; and he could not bear to look into the recesses of his own darkened spirit.

“Oliver;” he said earnestly; “Not a word more, or we become again as strangers. Look around you—Does the poor goat-herd owe nothing to the generous master who has exchanged his rags for velvet, and his walking-staff for a scymetar? Or do you deem that these were lightly won?”

“Not so;” replied his companion gently; “In

all sadness I say, Not so; they have indeed been but too dearly bought, for you have paid for them with your eternal welfare."

The Pasha smiled bitterly. "Nay, nay, Oliver," he said more calmly; "We are not to become controversialists at our first meeting, and cheat the churchmen of their due! It may be as you say; but our Imaums would on their side condemn the unbelief which rejects our mighty Prophet. Let us leave such points to those who are paid for their discussion. I am now pledged to the faith of Mahomet, and it is too late to talk to me of monkish craft or Christian arguments."

"Oh, do not believe it—" commenced the earnest Imperialist; and he was about to pour forth his ardent spirit in expostulation, when the Pasha said quietly, and in a tone rather of envy than of reproof:

"You cannot guess, Oliver, how strangely I have learnt to smile at the eagerness of the restless Franks. An Osmanli husbands his passions, and only suffers them to assert themselves by deeds; while you throw all your souls into your words, and waste your strength in useless arguments, which

seldom advance your cause. Let us not speak of the present. It involves a mighty and a fearful question, which should not be lightly handled. I love you as I love no other thing on earth.— Alas! I now possess little on which to pour out the best feelings of my heart—but you must not seek to handle a wound which will admit no probe, however delicate may be the touch of the operator. My star has led me on, and I have followed it; whether for good or evil I shall learn when the coil and fever of life shall have ceased for ever. There are mysterious influences which direct our destinies——”

“ Delusions of Satan!” interposed the anxious listener.

“ Perhaps so;” said the Pasha, with the same cold smile as before. “ But let us leave these subtleties, and fall back upon the past—the innocent and happy past! We had no blood upon our hands, Oliver, when we sported together among the blossoms of our sheltered valley; we were then young and pure, and recked not of the future that was in store for us.”

“ Coigny;” murmured the Christian officer;

“ Does the clear tone of our village bell, as it summoned us to early mass, never ring upon the ear of your memory ?”

“ Forbear ;” said his companion sternly ; “ We have had too much of this already ; and you were surely not sent hither by your haughty General to make a convert of Apdi Pasha !”

“ I am rebuked ;” was the sorrowful reply ; “ and yet the remembrance of our young affection——”

“ Serves you well now, Oliver ;” said his friend ; “ or our conference had been long since terminated.”

“ At least, then ;” pursued the high-hearted man ; “ since you forbid me to speak of your hereafter, suffer me to conjure you not to fling away your life by persisting in a hopeless resistance against the Christian army, which must involve your certain ruin. You have already done more than enough to maintain alike your self-respect and your lofty reputation ; do not, from a false and fatal idea of honour, sacrifice both yourself and your garrison.”

“ I will reply to your appeal ;” said the Pasha ;

" by gratifying your curiosity, and relating the circumstances of my adventurous life. I can make no more fitting answer. It is long since I have suffered myself to fall back so utterly upon the past, and it will cost me a pang to do so now; but I have ceased to shrink from suffering; and I owe it to your steady affection to show myself to you as I am."

He paused for a moment, and passed his hand slowly down his profuse and glossy beard, ere he carried it to his brow, and held it there for a short time, as if to stay the beating of his temples; and then, fixing his eyes steadily upon his attentive and anxious auditor, he commenced his tale.

" When I look upon myself, and on the men and scenes by which I am surrounded, the days of my boyhood come back upon my memory like a strange and pleasant dream; and I am sometimes tempted even to doubt whether my imagination does not indeed cheat my reason. I remember a narrow hut, backed against the living rock, from beneath whose deeply-projecting roof hung wreaths of grapes, drying in the soft wind which sighed past; and links of flax and herbs, ready to supply

the industry or the necessities of the peasant family. But I have holier memories than these—memories of a mother, and of sisters who loved me, and I dare not dwell on these; while snatches of a wilder and more truant taste even now at times make my heart throb, and my pulses quiver.

“Oh, the glory of those mighty mountains! I have traversed many a land of mysterious beauty since I shook the dust of my father’s cottage from my feet, but my thoughts ever revert to the majestic belt which shut in the valley of my birth, with a feeling that none other can rival them in sublimity! There, nature was magnificent in every phase. The rising and the setting sun, the hour of tempest, and the eve of summer, alike enhanced her loveliness; the vapours that draped the giant heights made pictures, as they rolled and wreathed themselves into fantastic volumes; and the bold wind that swept over the mountain crests, was surely balmier and more elastic than any that I have since breathed elsewhere.

“ You will forgive me, Oliver, if I dwell for a moment upon the remembrance of these things; for it is sweet amid a life of storm to pause and look back

upon a boyhood of peace and innocence : not dearer to the desert-wearied pilgrim is the green oasis where he rests for awhile amid the yawning waste."

The Pasha paused for an instant, and a deep shade of sadness passed over his fine and manly countenance ; but he had been tutored in self-government in a stern school, and he did not long yield to the emotion ; while Oliver, too much interested in the tale to which he was about to listen, to interrupt its progress by a word, sat silently beside him, with his hand fast locked within his own, and his dark eyes turned steadily earthward.

" When in despair at the loss of the goat, which you may remember to have preceded my flight from my native valley ;" suddenly continued the renegade ; " and cowering beneath the dread of a punishment which I too well knew that I had not power to avert ; and while meditating upon what would be its probable nature and extent, a strange feeling grew upon me which at first I could not analyze ; but gradually the unconscious yearning that had been for years sapping my spirit, to escape from the thraldom of my father's stern authority, and the narrow space which had hitherto been my

home, and to rush untrammelled into the wide and glorious world beyond; took a form tangible and distinct, and deepened into a burning thirst for freedom and adventure. I obeyed the impulse; and after one downward glance into the valley from the height on which I stood, and one sigh to the memory of my mother, I took the first path that offered itself to my aimless steps; and without guide or project, save the vague resolution of escape and exertion, separated myself for ever from the scenes and affections of my infancy.

“ It chanced that the direction which I had taken led directly to the French frontier; and as the apprehension of pursuit and capture gave added speed and suppleness to my young limbs, I was not long ere I reached it; and then, when I felt that I was in comparative safety, I began for the first time to reflect upon my helpless and destitute condition. But youth is not the season for despair. I was a mountaineer; and the hedgerow or the forest always supplied me with a meal, while every runlet of clear water was a banquet to the goat-herd’s child.

“ It was a proud feeling too in its novelty, that

of absolute self-dependence ; and the very necessity of moral as well as physical energy, gave me courage to press forward to my purpose.

“ The first pause which I had yet made near a human dwelling was beside a little way-side inn, whose rude porch of unbarked timber was so gracefully and invitingly wreathed with the large leaves, clinging tendrils, and fleecy blossoms of the wild cotton tree, that I halted for a moment to admire it ; when a young and sunburnt woman, with a laughing infant in her arms, which was playfully attempting to seize in its small and dimpled hand a tuft of the luxuriant parasite above its head, beckoned me to approach ; and seeing that I was way-worn and weary, invited me to rest upon the rude bench beneath the porch, where, placing before me a lump of black bread, and a cup of the thin sour wine of the province—which, however, seemed to me to be sweeter than the sherbet of the Prophet’s paradise—she bade me eat, and then put up a prayer for the deliverance of her only brother, who had been taken prisoner by the Turks.

“ Need I tell you that I did ample justice to her hospitality ? The repast was over, the prayer was

said, and I was just about to renew my thanks to my kind hostess, and depart, when two men, dressed in the common peasant-garb of the country, suddenly entered the porch. The younger of the two proved to be the husband of my benefactress ; and as he was about to take his mid-day meal, he bade me remain awhile and rest, and afterwards renew my journey, when the fervid heat of noon should have become somewhat tempered.

“ I required no second bidding, for communion with my kind was dearly welcome to me ; and thanking the worthy peasant for his care, I seated myself in a remote corner of the cottage, while he and his companion prepared to partake of the repast which his pretty and active wife spread out before them.

“ It was not long ere I became anxiously intent upon their discourse, for they spoke of the great Condé, and of all his glorious achievements ; and I felt my spirit burn within me, as the conviction forced itself upon my mind that my fate was now decided. Yes, I would be a soldier and a hero ; I would fight under the banners of this mighty man of war ; and I would earn a name beneath which

that of the poor goat-herd Coigny should be forgotten for ever.

"With all the frankness of youth I instantly made known my purpose to the hospitable peasant, who shook his head doubtfully, as he said: 'It is a noble trade, my good lad, but it is also a hard one. It is easier to tend goats upon the hills than to stand breast to breast with a mailed enemy.'

"'Were it not so, there would be no glory to be won by the bold of heart and the strong of arm ;' I replied. 'I will e'en try the venture. I am alone in the world ; and should I die young, all the tears have been already shed for me that I shall cause on earth. Never did I guess until this hour for what my spirit panted ; but now my path is straight, and I thank you that you have pointed to it.'

"'Poor boy:' said the good-natured wife, as she smoothed down my wild and clustering curls with her gentle hand ; 'he knows not what he does ; and it makes my heart ache to think of what may come of it.'

"I had, however, an ally in the elder peasant. 'Tis fitting that youth should overlook danger in order to win glory ;' he said in his turn ; 'and this

boy, friendless as he has made himself by his own act—for I had told them my short and simple story—‘ can choose no worthier trade. See you not that he is too wild and too hot-headed for a cotter’s life? E’en let him go as he lists; and the Saints prosper him that he has turned to nothing worse.’

“ Thus encouraged—for to a sanguine spirit even this was encouragement—I resolved to follow up my scheme; and after having requested as a parting grace that my host would direct me by the shortest road to the camp of the great Condé, I bade adieu to the honest group, and proceeded on my journey. I will not weary you with its details; let it suffice that I reached the army in safety; and having requested an interview with the officer of the party with which I first came in contact, I acquainted him unreservedly with my position, and my desire to become a volunteer under his renowned leader.

“ He listened attentively to my tale, simple and uninteresting as it was; for, as he afterwards told me, he was attracted by the earnest simplicity and enthusiasm of my manner; and felt glad that he had the opportunity of securing so promising a

youth. At the time, however, he made little comment, either upon me, or my request ; but simply telling me not to absent myself from that quarter of the camp, and giving me in charge to an inferior officer who was posted before his tent, he turned away to fulfil some military duty.

" Again in less than an hour I was summoned to his presence ; and with an emotion which I should vainly endeavour to describe, I found myself standing before the mighty Condé himself ; who, cased in steel, and leaning upon his cross-hilted sword, turned his eagle eye upon me, as he said kindly : ' And so, Captain Bellefond, this is your young runaway. We are likely to have a gallant army if light heels are to prove a passport to its ranks ! How say you, Switzer ; do you think that when your beard is grown you will be able to stand, and forswear the habit of your youth ? '

" ' At your back I will stand, noble Prince ;' was my reply ; ' while there is one throb of life in my heart, or one touch of pride in my spirit.'

" ' Why, 'tis boldly spoken !' said Condé, as he glanced towards Bellefond, who stood respectfully beside him ; ' and we will trust to the assurance.

You have done him good service, my friend, in bringing him before me ; let him take heed that he is just to himself. I confide him to your charge ; keep him near you ; and I need not tell you to deal with him according to his deserts. And you, boy ;' he added, once more addressing me, as he turned to leave the spot ; ' follow in all things the orders of the gallant officer who has constituted himself your patron ; for you could not have a braver or a better.'

" And then, without awaiting a reply, and apparently not heeding the proud and grateful inclination with which Bellefond acknowledged his flattering encomium, he strode hastily away.

" Strange links of fate, by which men are fettered to their destinies ! Little did I imagine that the favour of the French General was to lead me to a Pashalik ; and yet thus it was to be.

" The partiality of my patron increased daily ; and at the battle of Rocroy, where I was instrumental in saving his life, I bound him to my interests for ever. Brave as a lion, he knew not the meaning of fear, and spurned danger as he would have done disgrace. I was, as usual, beside him at the com-

mencement of the action, but during a charge we became separated; and when after a moment's anxious search I again caught sight of him in the *mélée*, I saw him in the midst of the enemy, fighting like a hero against hopeless odds, where it was only marvellous that he had been able to defend himself even for an instant.

"Shouting aloud, '*Death or Bellefond!*' I dashed forward, followed by a handful of our own gallant company; and after some hard blows we succeeded in hewing a path for his escape, through which we bore him back in triumph to his friends. The fortunes of the day had not been long decided, when one of Condé's dragoons rode up to that quarter of the field which was occupied by the division of the army to which I was attached, and summoned me to attend immediately at the Prince's tent.

"Taken by surprise, I obeyed with some trepidation; for I was still covered with dust and smoke, and I had no time to adjust my dress. My right arm was bound with a scarf to stop the effusion of blood which had flowed from a deep flesh-wound just below the shoulder, and discoloured my uni-

form ; and I felt that I made altogether but a poor appearance to present myself to my General.

“ Not so, however, appeared to think Conde himself; for I had scarcely neared his tent when he came forth, attended by Bellefond, and bearing in his hand a small flag. ‘ You are welcome, Coigny ; ’ he said in an accent of condescending kindness ; ‘ you have made an apt pupil to a gallant tutor, who has not failed to render you the justice which is your due. In the name of the army, as well as in my own, I thank you, young Sir, for the life of Captain Bellefond ; and as a remembrance of your fidelity and courage, rather than its requital, I present you with these colours. You will quit your station in the ranks, and become henceforward an ensign in the company of your friend. You have earned your first step nobly : nor do I fear that the future will be only a reflection of the past.’

“ As he ceased speaking he extended towards me the badge of my advancement, which I received on my bended knee, and with my left hand, for my wound had so stiffened from want of care, that the right arm had become powerless.

“ ‘ So, so ; our young officer is disabled for the

moment, it would appear ;' said the Prince ; ' Look to it, Bellefond, for I trust that we shall have more work for him ere long.'

" Thus, Oliver, the dreams of my ambition began to be realized. Trusted by my chief, beloved by my patron, and respected by my comrades, I had a long vista of honour and of hope before me. The campaign was, as you know, a sharp as well as a lengthy one ; and in 1665, I found myself not only possessed of the rank of Captain, but one of the officers of the auxiliary force of ten thousand men sent by Louis XIV. to the assistance of the Emperor of Germany in his war against the Turks, under the command of Marshal Coligny.

" United with the Imperialist troops under Montecuculy, we advanced on St. Gothard, where the Moslem army was defeated in the August of the same year ; but although the Christians gained the day, it was, notwithstanding, my fate to be taken prisoner after a fierce but unavailing resistance. The Grand Vēsir Achmet Kiuprili, a man of courage and understanding, had lost the greater portion of his troops through the impetuous gallantry of the French forces, whom he now

encountered for the first time ; and to whom he was compelled, despite the disappointment and mortification to which they had subjected him, to yield both his admiration and esteem.

“ After the battle, which had terminated so disastrously for the cause of the Crescent, he reviewed the prisoners in person ; and his attention was directed towards myself by one of his principal officers, who informed him that my followers had fought like wild beasts to rescue me, after my capture ; and that my own struggles had been those of a man whose heart and arm must alike have been made of iron.

“ The consequence was an order that I should be conducted to his tent after the sunset prayer ; and thither I was accordingly led under a strong guard, and confronted with the Moslem General. An interpreter had been provided, and the Vēsir asked me numerous judicious questions concerning the disposition and strength of the Christian army ; all of which I answered cautiously and with considerable reservation ; and when he discovered that nothing further could be elicited from my replies, he dismissed me from his presence ; having pre-

viously commanded the Aga by whom I had been guarded across the camp, to imprison me in some secure place, to load me with heavy chains, and to remember that the Osmanli had much to revenge upon the Christian.

“ The order was obeyed to the very letter : all mercy was denied to me ; I was bent beneath the weight of ponderous fetters ; my wounds left to heal as they best might ; and my food so scantily supplied that I was soon reduced to a state of the greatest misery.

“ The only intruder upon my painful solitude was the interpreter to whom I have already alluded. This man, who was by birth a Marseillois, had been expelled from his native city in consequence of some heavy crime ; and turning renegade, had attached himself to the army of the Grand Vēsir, whose confidence he had gained by his ready wit and subtle policy. In such a position as mine the sound of a language familiar to me from my boyhood, alone would have sufficed to render him a welcome visitor ; but when, coupled with this, came the charm of sympathy, and that he exhausted himself in pity and in sorrow for my sufferings, I soon

learned to look for his appearance as the wrecked mariner watches for the streak of dawn.

"At length our discourse took another and a newer bent, and he began to talk to me of hope—of escape—of honours, and advancement. He told me that all of these were within my reach; and then he contrasted with them my present state of squalor, famine, and hopelessness. My breath came thick and fast as he proceeded, and I bade him say on, for I began to surmise the truth; and although I felt as if I could have seized him, and strangled him with my fetters, rather than that he should put his meaning into words, still a strange coward love of life grappled at my heart, and made me powerless.

"He profited by my bidding, and told me the condition on which I was to inherit liberty and power; I must become a Moslem! I had seen—I had felt that it was this—but I only laughed out in the bitterness of my spirit, and reminded him that I was a soldier and a Christian.

"The laugh was echoed by one as bitter and as mocking as my own. A soldier! Aye, with a chain about my throat, and gyves upon my wrists!

A Christian! Yes—cut off from my own altars and my own faith, and wasting away beneath the shadow of a Moslem mosque! But it must be even as I would: he had sought as a countryman, who had himself learnt wisdom from misfortune, to save me as he had himself been saved; his vain attempt was over, and he left me to die in peace.

“Those were his parting words—To die in peace! And he said this to me—to me! The ambitious soldier cut short in his career, a captive and a slave—the humble Christian, to whom a mother’s lips had first taught the blessedness of prayer—the strong man, bowed by wounds, and famine, and the chain—to me, who lay there on my foul straw *alone*. Oh, none can know the full meaning of that frightful word until they have been cut off as I was then, from home, from country, and from hope—and the scoffer bade me *die in peace!*”

“My very indignation gave me strength; and I had no sooner recovered from the vehemence of my passion than I began to review my past fortunes, and to speculate upon my future fate. A thousand vague visions of ultimate escape, should I feign to accept the proposals of my captor, floated across

my imagination, each leaving its own impalpable impress behind it. I remembered that I could not long survive in the state of wretchedness to which I was now reduced ; and to die there, like a houseless dog, the scoff and scorn of every passer-by, was not like death amid the crush of battle. I grew sick at heart as I glanced round upon the filthy shed into which I had been thrust, and then down upon the fetters that were rusting into my flesh ; but I did not waver in my resolve. Bitter as it was, so must it be ; and even thus was death to come upon me !

“ I saw no one for days : my food, coarse and scanty as it had ever been, was all consumed ; my limbs were becoming rigid, and failed to obey the dictates of my will. I could have borne hunger with fortitude, but a burning thirst consumed me, and my parched and blistered tongue clave to my fevered throat. Would it not seem as though a wretch, such as I now describe, should have hailed death as a deliverance, and resigned his existence without a struggle ? Perchance it might have been so with myself, had not the treacherous renegade once more visited my squalid prison, and feigning

horror at my agonies, held to my lips a cup of water.

"No, Oliver, never—not even amid the tortures of the rack could I ever recal that draught without a thrill of joy almost to madness. It gave me back life—hope—liberty. I drank and I blessed him—blessed him with a Christian's blessing, and gazed upon him with my dim eyes, in all the intensity of gratitude. And then the tempter spoke again. He bade me save myself for a career of power and splendour; and he warned me that he now indeed spoke to me for the last time, for that on the morrow I was to be exiled into Asia with forty other prisoners, there to drag on an existence of drudgery and insult."

The Pasha paused; and with a handkerchief which lay beside him wiped away the large drops of moisture that had gathered upon his brow, ere he again proceeded in a broken voice.

"Who shall decide, my friend, between the light and the darkness? If, indeed, I have erred beyond hope, then did I sell my soul for that draught of water. It brought back to my withered frame the love of life—the desire for action. Enough,—the

Vēsir was informed of my concession ; my chains were struck off ; my wounds cleansed and dressed ; and two Imaums appointed to receive the token of my apostacy, and to instruct me in my new duties. The renegade was beside me ; he propped my sinking head, administered a cordial which lent me temporary strength, and then murmured into my ear the words which were to render me an alien to the God of my fathers ; and which I repeated equally without emotion and without thought.

“ ‘*Allah il Allah, Mehmet resoul Allah !*’ whispered my self-constituted tutor, so soon as he satisfied himself that I had recovered strength to profit by his lesson. ‘*Allah il Allah, Mehmet resoul Allah !*’ I echoed back, as it were instinctively—and I had abjured my Saviour !

“ Honours and favour followed fast upon my conversion. The Vēsir himself visited me in the comfortable dwelling to which I had been transported ; and a rich turban, a scymetar inlaid with chased gold, and a jewel-hilted dagger, were presented to me as an earnest of his protection ; while he himself placed in my hands two purses of dark green

silk, one of them containing a hundred gold pieces, and the other my appointment as an Aga.

" Singular mutations of destiny ! Who shall gather up the sea-sand and count its grains, or take up the tangled skein of fate, and separate its confused and intricate threads ? Let he who can do this, sit in judgment on Apdi Pasha.

" Great was the transition from the damp and noisome prison whence I had been delivered, to the luxurious dwelling wherein I was now installed. The Vēsir appeared to think that he could never sufficiently congratulate himself upon the convert that he had made ; while, on my side, flattered and conciliated by the deference with which I was everywhere received, I did not seek to dwell upon the price at which it had been purchased. I had no fear of treachery, for I was conscious that I could repay a hundred-fold the benefits of my new allies ; and with my ambition and my vanity alike satisfied, I soon forgot my projects of escape, and attached myself with all the earnestness of my nature, to the confiding and generous Achmet.

" A termination had been put for the time to the war in Hungary ; and in 1667 the Vēsir was de-

puted to take possession of Candia, whither, as I was now constantly associated in his enterprises, I accordingly accompanied him.

“ All human vanities are well nigh over for me, Oliver, for my destiny will soon be accomplished ; and thus I may permit myself to assert, that to my own efforts was mainly owing the capture of the city, and ultimately of the whole island, after a two years’ siege, almost unparalleled. My reward was the rank of Seraskier ; and on our return to Constantinople Achmet Kiuprili spoke so warmly to the Sultan of my services, that I was summoned to his presence, and loaded with present riches, and still more costly pledges for the future.

“ The imaginative portion of my nature was satisfied. The wildest and most truant dreams of my youth had never shadowed forth the realities of my manhood. Beauty, gold, and obedience, were all mine at the first signal ; and if I did not become intoxicated by my prosperity, it was because an icy finger had been laid upon my heart, which would not yield to the genial current of my fortunes.

“ Oliver—its pressure is there yet ; and to you —but to you only, dare I avow that it seems to trace for ever the name of HIM whom I have denied.

“ Two years after the cession of Candia, war was declared with Poland, and to me was entrusted the capture of the strong fortress of Kamienzik ; while great as were my resources, I required them all to succeed in so important an undertaking. I will give you no detail of the siege : enough that it was successful ; and that shortly afterwards peace was concluded between the Sultan and the Polish monarch. I served no ungrateful master ; for with the intelligence that hostilities had ceased between the two countries, I received also the information of my appointment to the Pashalik of Bender.

“ I hastened to take possession of my government ; and there it was that I first tasted the luxury of prosperous repose. My life had hitherto been one of toil and adventure, but there I seemed to have found a haven of peace, whence I could look forth unharmed upon the storm and tempest of a world in which I had so long played an active part ; and with this mental tranquillity grew the desire to gain

tidings of those who had been dear to me in earlier years.

“ Among the prisoners whom we made in Candia, I particularly remarked a young man of prepossessing appearance and singularly cultivated mind, for whom I felt an immediate interest spring up within me; and great was my delight when I learnt that his name was Dumont, and that he was the kinsman of my patron Bellefond. Rejoiced to have found an opportunity of proving to my early friend how deeply his kindness had impressed my heart, I instantly ransomed the youth, and dismissed him laden with presents, under a safe escort, to his kinsman; to whom I bade him tell in detail the history of a life too eventful for written explanation; and then, satisfied that one at least of those who had known me as the Switzer Coigny would do me justice, I departed, as I have already told you, for my Pashalik, trusting that destiny would again throw into my path others of my early friends.

“ I soon gained the love of those about me. The task was easy, for my position rendered me absolute as a Sovereign Prince in the province which I governed; and as I exerted my authority gently,

and with strict regard to justice, I excited no enmity; while I secured a crowd of adherents. So calmly, indeed, did my days pass by, that all I asked of fortune was to leave to me the favour of the Sultan, the friendship of the Pasha, and the government of Bender.

“This however, was not to be. The renewal of hostilities between the Porte and the German Emperor was the signal of my recall to more active life; but I nevertheless took no direct part in the war until, in 1683 the Pasha of this city was mortally wounded during the attack of your forces, after the raising of the siege of Vienna: when the important command of Buda was confided to me by my trusting and generous master: and so help me Allah and the Prophet! I will never leave the citadel alive!”

As the Pasha concluded his recital, the Imperialist officer flung himself upon his neck. “Hear me, Coigny;” he said in all the earnestness of affection; “There is yet time. Reconcile yourself with your country and with your God. Look upon me no longer as the Envoy of Lorraine, but as the friend of your early years. I have listened eagerly

to your tale, and one blessed conviction has grown upon me. You are not happy, Coigny ; throughout all your career, gorgeous and prosperous as it appears, you have never been so. Abandon this false glare of greatness, and return to the friends and to the faith from which you have been so long divided. Do you not recognise the hand of Providence in this strange meeting of the two obscure Swiss boys in the war-rent capital of a distant land ? Do not resist it, Coigny ; with a happy heart and a free conscience you will have no time to regret the empty vanities which you must abandon to secure them.”

As his friend spoke, the Pasha turned aside with a troubled brow and an averted eye. It was plain that there was a fierce struggle in the breast of the brave but misguided renegade ; and Oliver, anxious to push his advantage to the uttermost, hurriedly pursued his arguments.

“ Nay, more ;” he said emphatically ; “ it is your duty to save alike yourself and those committed to your charge from speedy and inevitable destruction. The ramparts of your city are failing in every direction ; the heavy guns of the Imperialists will

rake the fortress from end to end ; the Christian army outnumbers your attenuated garrison at least fifty fold ; and the soldiers are flushed with recent victory, and eager for further triumph.”

He paused for a reply ; but as none was offered, he once more resumed his efforts, hopeless as they appeared ; and as he had failed to shake the courage of his listener, he next proceeded to assail his egotism, which he doubted not that long habits of luxury and profusion must have nursed into excess. Acting upon this presumption, he accordingly continued ; “ But it is worse than idle to point the attention of an able and experienced leader like yourself to facts so palpable as these. I will therefore generalize no longer, but frankly tell you that I am authorised to offer to you the highest honours in the Imperial army, a heavy sum paid down in gold from the coffers of the State, and an appointment under the crown, equal to that which you now hold of the Sultan, if you will abandon further thoughts of resistance, and so terminate this harassing and ill-omened war. Think of this, Coigny, ere you dismiss me ; and when to these pledges, I add the readiness of

Lorraine to accede to any conditions which you may see fit to make on abdicating your government of this outraged Christian city, surely you will concede to the holiness of our friendship what you might perchance have refused to the urgency even of a generous enemy."

As the last words escaped the excited lips of the Envoy, the Pasha turned gravely towards him, with a brow as calm as though no passion had ever stirred the pulses beneath it; and there was a collectedness in the tone of his reply, which at once convinced the listener that his cause was lost.

"Oliver;" he said; "You have honestly fulfilled your mission, both as a Christian and as a soldier; honestly towards your sovereign, but falsely as regards your friend. You may have loved the goat-herd Coigny, but you do not comprehend Apdi Pasha. I have laid bare my heart before you, and how have you read it? You have sought to make a profit of my apostacy. Learn that I may suffer, but that I cannot become a second time a renegade. You have striven to crush me into cowardice; know that I would rather die than

live, if life were to involve one second of dishonour. But last and worst, you have endeavoured to buy me at a price—Fye ! fyé ! do you hold me as so mean and pitiful a thing that I am to be bartered like a bale of merchandise, and transferred to the best bidder ? I tell you, Christian, that your cannon sunk a mine of wealth just off the Blocksberg, that would have put to shame your paltry bribe, and taught you that the cotter's son had learnt to estimate such baubles cheaply !

“ Thus much to the Envoy of Lorraine : for you—my friend—I have another answer. Could I have thought that he whom I once loved, and whose young memory has haunted me throughout a troublous life like a sweet vision, could have believed that words would make a traitor of his friend, I would have steeped those words in blood. But I know you better, Oliver ; you have persisted in a painful task, which is now ended. You did not hope to move me—*you dared not*. The treason of Apdi Pasha would have made you scorn the friendship of Coigny—I will follow the example you have so nobly set. I, too, will do my duty. The order of the Padishah, my master, to surrender the citadel

of Buda to the forces of Lorraine, could not reach me before to-morrow eve ; and without it, I will never lift a hand to avert its fate. I will save it to the Crescent, or perish amid its ruins. You have my answer. And now, farewell, my first and best-loved friend. Return to your brave General, and tell him that you have failed, because *he* was no traitor with whom you came to treat ; and chance what may, be not rash, Oliver, in the coming conflict ; for now that we have met again, should I survive the fray, and learn that you had fallen, existence would be but bitterness."

The Pasha rose as he uttered the last words ; and clapping his hands thrice, the door was again flung back by the same attendants who had closed it behind them when they entered ; and although Oliver would fain have indulged in a few more parting words, one glance at the Moslem leader sufficed to convince him that their conference was ended. Not a trace of passion, not a quiver of emotion lingered upon his brow or lip. He looked as if suddenly stricken into stone ; and the Imperialist officer had no alternative save to make a profound obeisance, which was unreturned and ap-

parently unheeded by its object, and to pass out of the apartment.

On his return to the camp, the baffled Envoy reported to Lorraine not only the failure of his mission, but also the extraordinary circumstance by which it was attended; and at once convinced him that nothing was to be hoped from either the ambition or the weakness of the Infidel leader.

Early on the following morning the work of destruction began; but the defence was as desperate as the attack. A company of Hungarian grenadiers succeeded in gaining the breach above the river, where they were met hand to hand by the Infidels, and several of them dragged within the walls, whence they were flung back in savage scorn, mutilated, and dead. Repulsed, but not disheartened, they advanced a second time, followed closely by a corps of German infantry; but the same result ensued. The Moslem rent the air with their wild battle-cry, and the Pasha himself appeared to be possessed of ubiquity, so universally was he seen wherever the strife was thickest; while so extraordinary was his energy, that for a time it threatened the assailants with discomfiture; for the belief soon became general

among the Christian troops that he was gifted with superhuman power, and consequently beyond their reach.

At the very moment when this dangerous idea was gaining ground, Prince Louis of Baden brought up his troops, and among them the regiment of Oliver. This accession of strength at once dispelled the apprehensions of the assailants, and with a loud cry of "God and St. Stephen!" they once more rushed to the walls; but the blood of Oliver seemed to freeze about his heart as he recognised immediately above the breach, the stately figure of his friend, rendered still more conspicuous by his lofty turban, with its heron feather secured by a huge carbuncle, that flung back the sun glints as they flashed upon it.

His first impulse was to save him, or to perish at his side; and he pressed on over the wounded and the dying, where each was struggling to be foremost, and wading through a sea of blood; and when the wall was at length gained, Oliver was among the first who stood upon the lofty rampart, where he beheld not twenty paces from him Apdi Pasha defending himself against a score of enemies

with gallant courage, but with exhausted strength; for his blows fell faintly, and his costly robe was dripping gore.

"Hold!" he exclaimed, in the extremity of his despair, as he forced a passage towards his friend; "Hold as ye are true men, and Christians!" But the last words were rendered inaudible, for ere he could pronounce them, a random shot entered his heart, and he fell dead over the body of the Pasha, who had been simultaneously struck down by one of the German troopers, against whom he had so long and so bravely striven!

With him sank the proud Crescent from the towers and pinnacles of Buda, never again to desecrate by its Infidel supremacy the capital of Christian Hungary.*

* It may be expedient to explain that this tradition is strictly historical in *all* its details.

CONCLUSION.

THE last tale was told ; and the heavy pattering of the rain against the casements confirmed the certainty of the sudden and long-looked-for thaw. The Count Pálffy's narrative had been lengthy ; and when it was concluded the party rose to retire for the night. Eagerly, however, as the present moment had been anticipated, its actual advent was not greeted with the demonstrative delight which might have been expected ; for each individual of the circle felt that the past week had been not only one of harmony, but even of something which would have been happiness, had not their own impatient spirits thrown a shadow over every enjoyment ; and who should say what the next might produce ? In some instances casual acquaintance had grown into friendship ; in one or two others friendship had progressed into affection ; while that most calm and blessed of all feelings “ peace and good will,” had been universal.

Nor were there wanting individuals beneath that stately roof to whom the breaking up of the courtly circle was a subject of unmixed regret. The young miner was to return to Schemnitz with the dawn; the pale student to retrace his steps to Debretzin, its lofty halls, and ponderous folios; east, west, north, and south, the breeze of fancy, fashion, or caprice was to scatter the mere idlers of the party; while even the light-hearted Pálffy himself could not escape the conviction, that many of the bright glances and soft tones which had been all his own in the frontier-castle, must necessarily be bestowed upon others when his fair mistress was once more an inmate of Vienna, and making one in its gay and dissipated crowd.

We have, however, no space to moralize upon this fact. Suffice it that at day-dawn all was hurry and activity in the halls and galleries; and that it was with genuine satisfaction that the departing guests saw a bright sun burst through the morning vapours, and give earnest of a cheerful day.

The Lady of Revay was early astir with her gracious smile and graceful courtesy, ever anxious to do honour to her cousin's hospitality; the unfettered

river, freed from its icy bondage, was gliding and glistening beneath the windows ; the forest-trees had cast off their fleecy burthen, and stood out dark and leafless, with their massy boles and delicate tracery clearly defined against the sky ; and the heavy drops were plashing rapidly upon the ramparts as they fell from the projecting portions of the edifice ; while occasionally the rustling descent of a large body of congealed snow, detached from the roofs and buttresses, gave evidence that the work of renovation was busily going forward.

It was one hour past noon when the Lord of the fortress stood beside his gentle kinswoman, as they watched together from the diamond-shaped casement which commanded the steep road that led downward to the valley, the departure of their last guest.

“ The Saints speed them !” said the Baroness, in her low sweet voice : “ How much hope and fear, how much joy and sorrow, have departed this day from beneath our roof ! What a little world of impulse and sensation, of grief and gladness, has now crumbled away, never, probably to reunite ! The past month has appeared to me a type of

human existence. All passes by—the good and the evil alike—all save hope, and a better trust."

"Nay, nay—I shall not suffer you to relapse into melancholy;" smiled her kinsman; "Chance and change must come to all; but every chance is not evil, nor does every change bring sorrow. The bright circle that is now broken up has been to us in our retirement like a pleasant echo of the busy world from which we have become voluntary exiles; and let us hope that they who composed it may never be compelled by care or anxiety to look back with regret to their month's sojourn on the Transylvanian frontier."

END.













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